Where Are They Now?

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Sports Illustrated

SUMMER DOUBLE ISSUE
July 4-11, 2016

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40 Years After Montreal

Caitlyn Jenner

As You Know Her Now.
Bruce Jenner
As You Never Knew Him Then

By Tim Layden P. 30
Photograph By Yu Tsai
JUNE 1, 2016
MALIBU, CALIF.

PLUS

Ken Griffey Jr.
An Overdue Farewell (And a Hello to the Hall)
By Ben Reiter P. 48

The Magnificent Seven
20 Years After Their Golden Moment
By Greg Bishop P. 66

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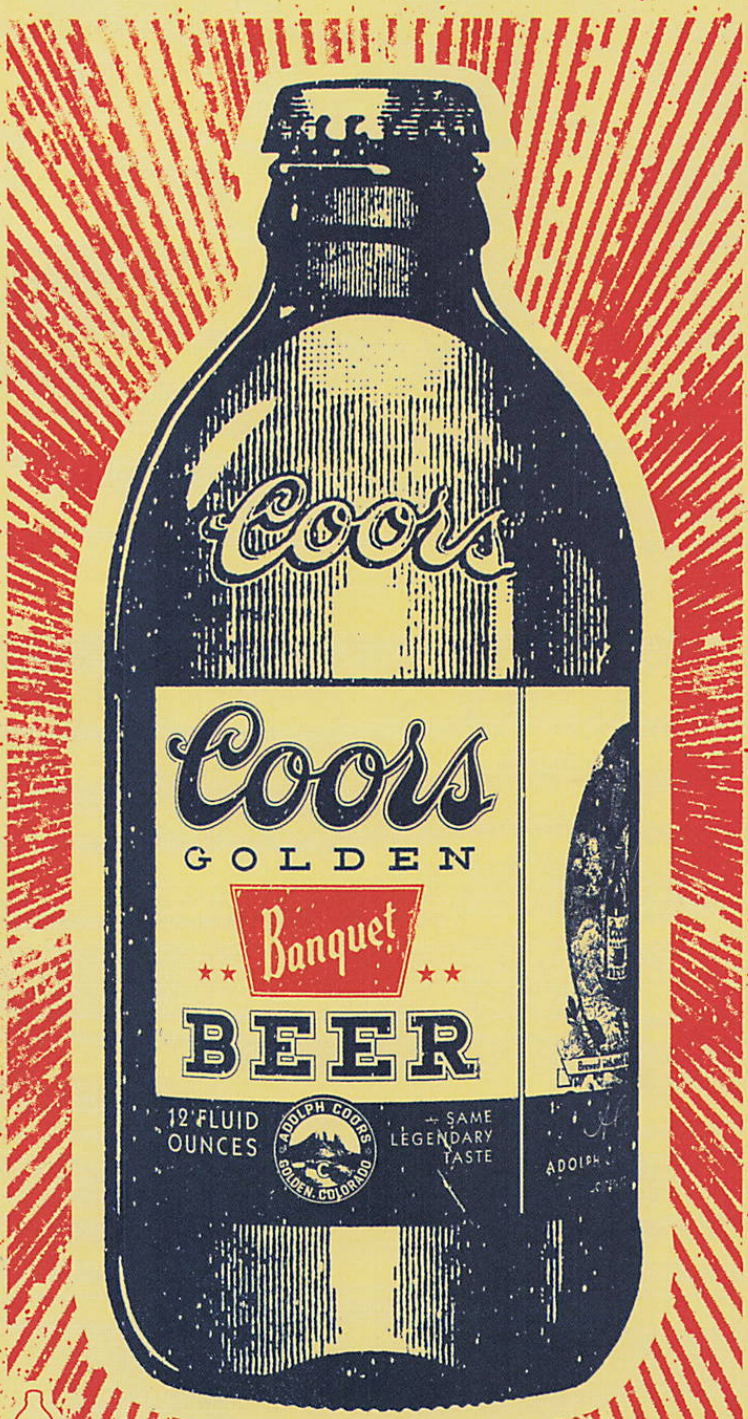

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2016 SUMMER DOUBLE ISSUE

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COVER INSET: Walter Iooss Jr.

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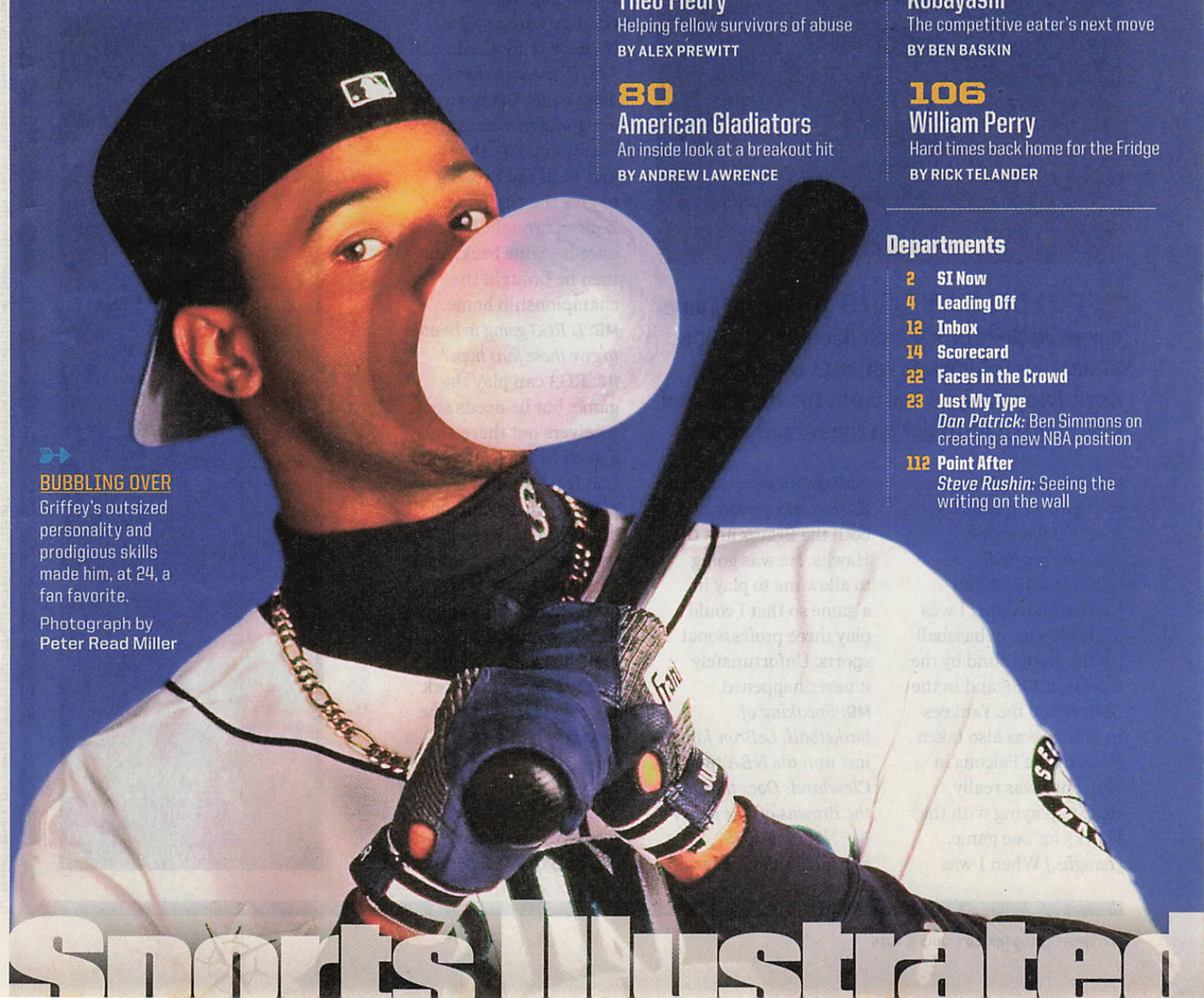

BUBBLING OVER
Griffey's outsized personality and prodigious skills made him, at 24, a fan favorite.

Photograph by **Peter Read Miller**

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Sports Illustrated

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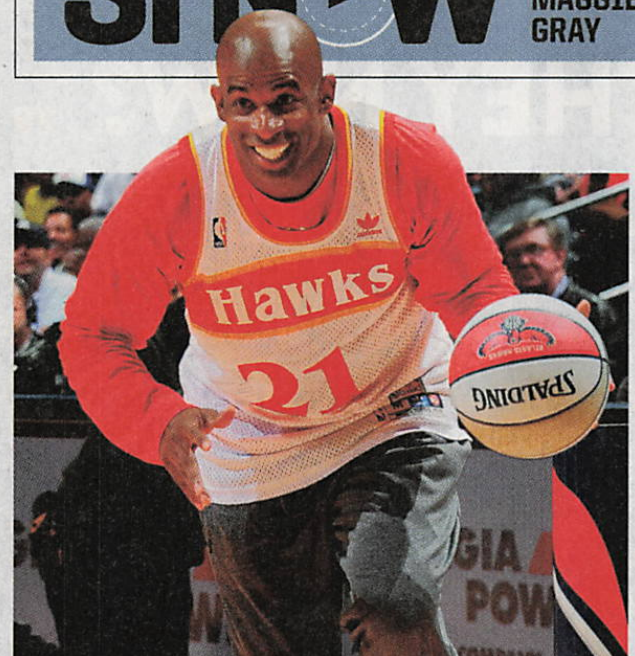

DEION SANDERS **The Hall of Fame cornerback-return specialist and two-time Super Bowl champion reflects on his draft days, hoop dreams and what the Browns and RG3 need to do to get on the winning track.**

MAGGIE GRAY: *What are your favorite memories from the three times you were drafted?*

DEION SANDERS: You just reminded me: I was drafted twice in baseball [in the sixth round by the Royals in 1985 and in the 30th round the Yankees in '88; he was also taken No. 5 by the Falcons in '89], but I was really close to playing with the Hawks for one game. *[Laughs.]* When I was with the Braves, Stan Kasten was president of both the Braves and the Hawks. He was going to allow me to play in a game so that I could play three professional sports. Unfortunately it never happened.

MG: *Speaking of basketball, LeBron James just won the NBA title for Cleveland. Does that take the Browns off the hook?*

DS: No. It simply distracts the fans for a moment. Basketball is wonderful, but football is everything. *Everything!* As soon as training camp opens, it's back to football. And [Cleveland fans] don't think the Browns are going to win the championship; they just want the Browns to give the city hope. LeBron brought hope once he came back, and then he brought the championship home.

MG: *Is RG3 going to be able to give those fans hope?*

DS: RG3 can play the game, but he needs some receivers out there and a good [offensive] line. I do feel like RG3 is playing with a chip on his shoulder because he went from the big house to the outhouse really quick in Washington, and it humbled him. Now he is now putting forth the effort to work his butt off to get to the next level. □

"I was really close to playing for the Hawks for one game."
–Deion Sanders

For more of Sanders's interview, plus the SI Now archive, go to ***SI.com/sinow***

TUNE IN

EPISODE: JUNE 20
SI contributing baseball writer Jay Jaffe explores whether the Pirates should trade **Andrew McCutchen**

EPISODE: JUNE 21
Believeland director Andrew Billman on why the Cavs should give former coach **David Blatt** a ring

EPISODE: JUNE 22
Comedian **Connor Toole** explains how he persuaded people that he was drafted by the Jazz

EPISODE: JUNE 23
SI deputy managing editor L. Jon Wertheim looks at the ripple effect the 1996 NBA draft had on the league

SCOTT CUNNINGHAM/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES (SANDERS); JUSTIN K. ALLER/GETTY IMAGES (MCCUTCHEN); JASON MILLER/GETTY IMAGES (BLATT); TWITTER.COM (TOOLE); NATHANIEL S. BUTLER/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES (1996 DRAFT)

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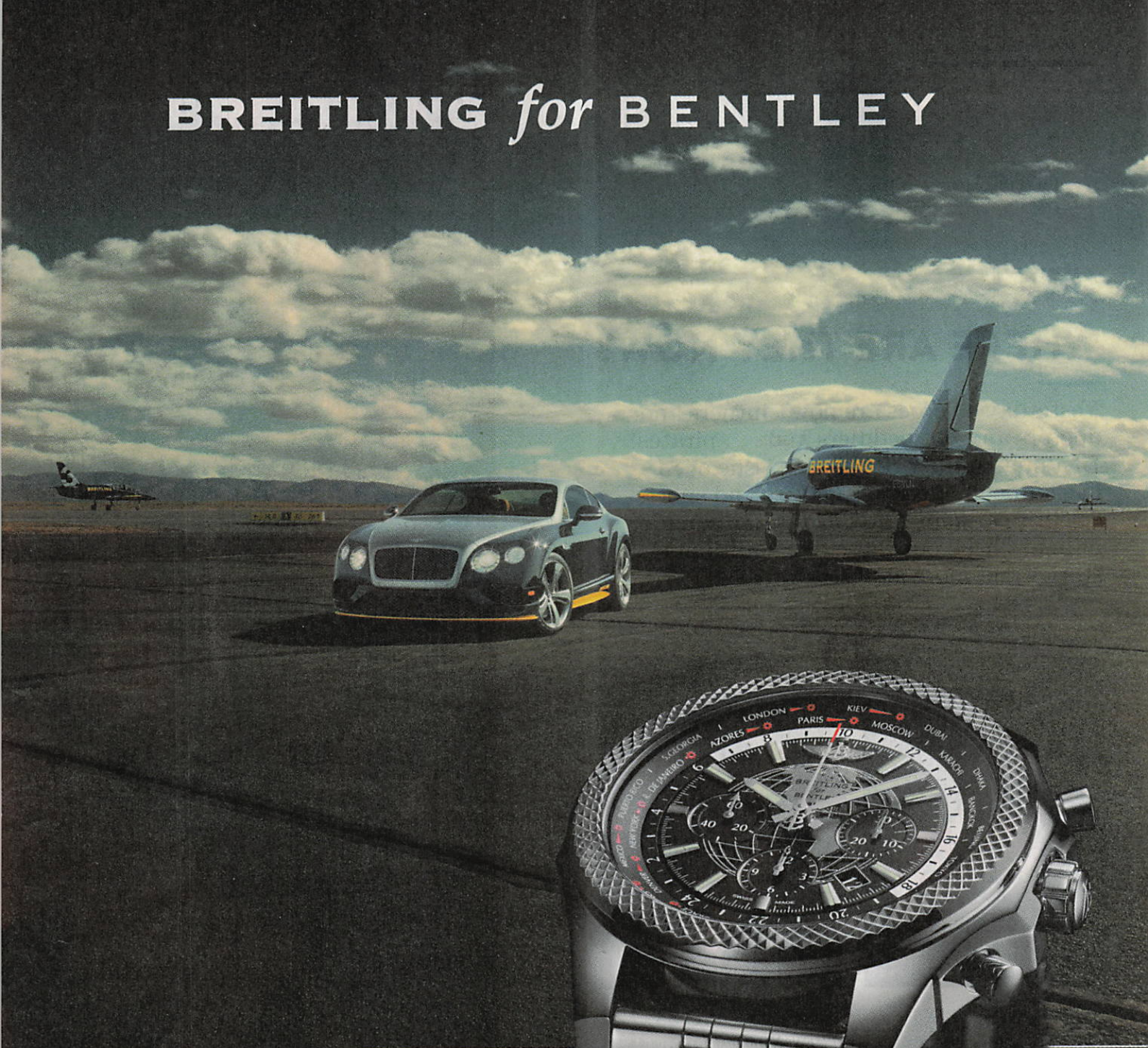

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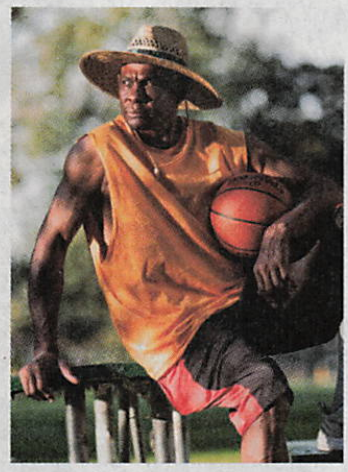
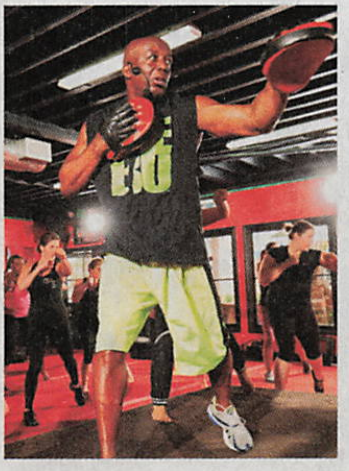
WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Yesterday's heroes are now vintners and doctors and pot peddlers and . . . pirates? In a midsummer ritual, this issue of SI has a lineup of former players and sports celebrities—plus a stellar reserve squad online. Check out these five additional stories and more at **SI.com/WATN**

CHRISTY MARTIN
THEN: Women's boxing icon
NOW: Abuse survivor, teacher



BILLY RAY BATES
THEN: NBA flash in the pan
NOW: Wandering spirit



BILLY BLANKS
THEN: Exercise fad leader
NOW: Still punching

JORGE CAMPOS
THEN: Mexico goalkeeper
NOW: Golfer, TV analyst

BILL FRAKES (MARTIN); PETER READ MILLER (BATES); KOHJIRO KINNO (CAMPOS, BLANKS)

PAT CROCE
THEN: 76ers owner
NOW: Pirate enthusiast

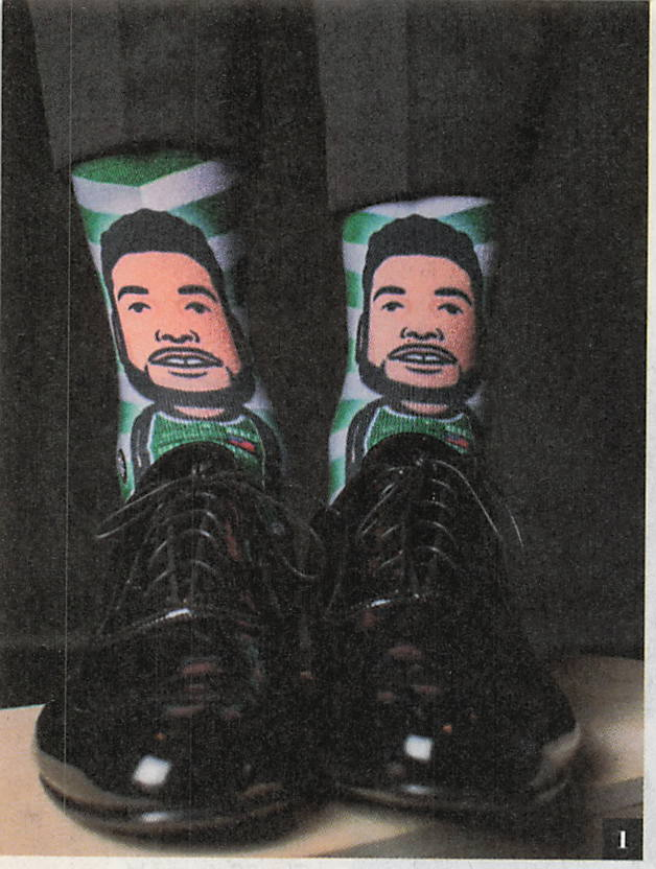
Photograph by
JEFFERY A. SALTER

Leading Off

Reign Check

Chase Kalisz (far left) began his pursuit of defending Olympic champion Ryan Lochte (near left) on Sunday in Omaha during the opening heats of the 400 individual medley. The 22-year-old Kalisz, from Bel Air, Md., would go on to win the event in 4:09.54, while Jay Litherland, 20, finished second to claim the other qualifying spot for the Rio Games. Lochte, an 11-time Olympic medalist who at 31 had not planned to defend his title in the 400 IM, came in third.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
DONALD MIRALLE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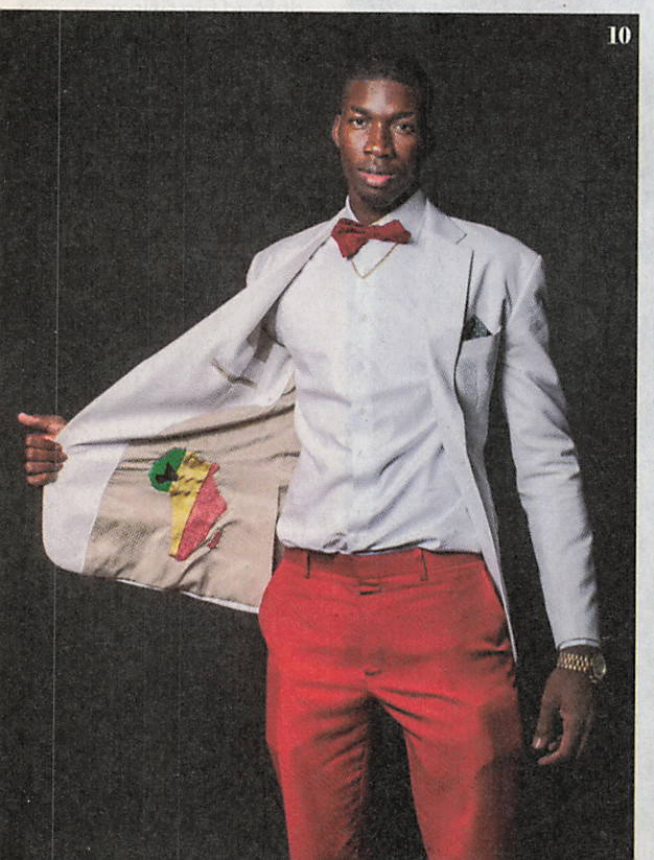
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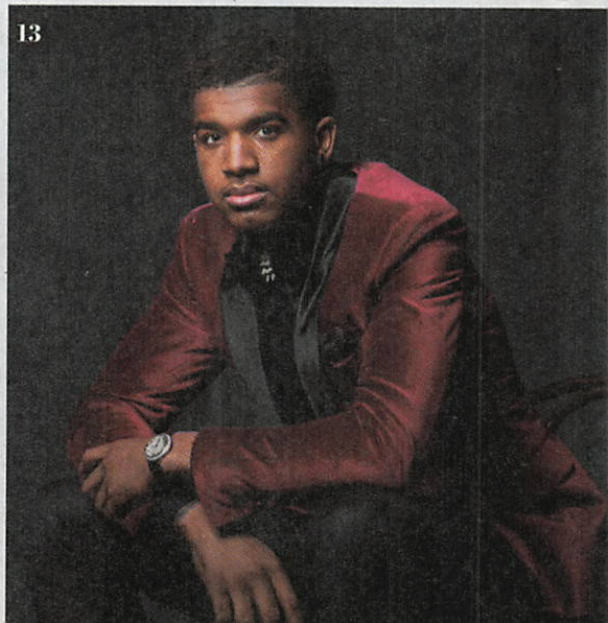
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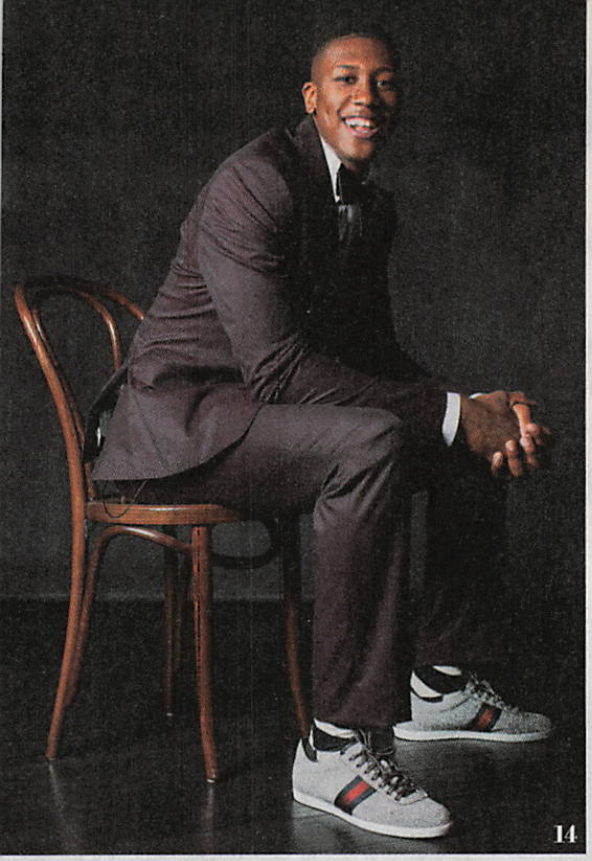
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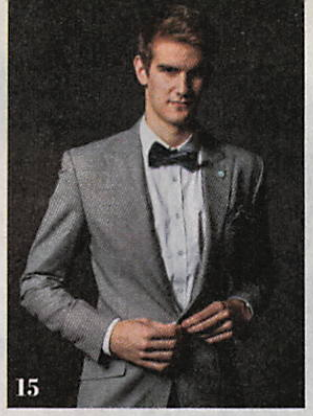
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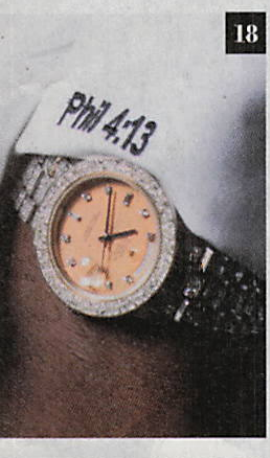

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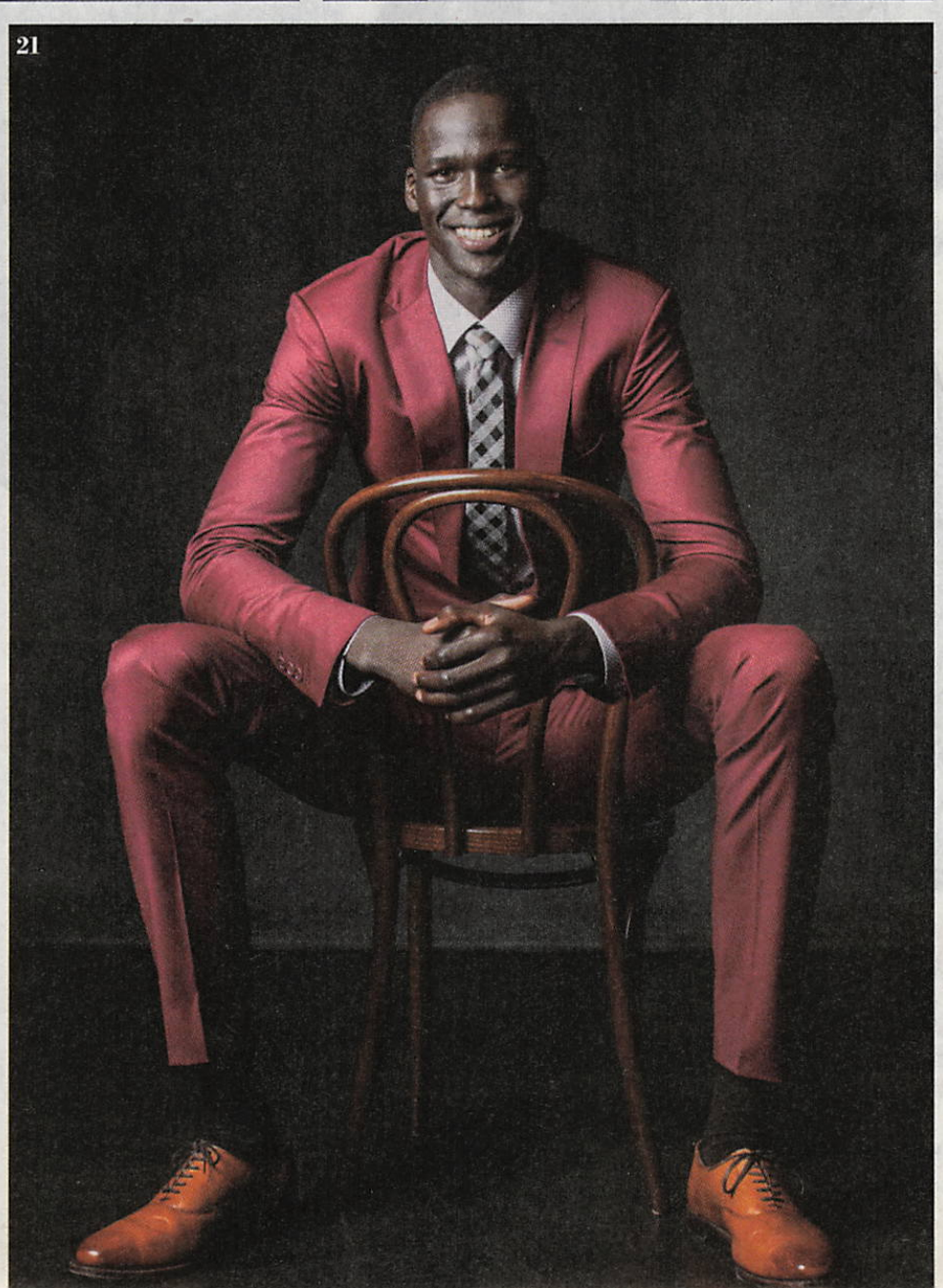
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Leading Off

The Flair Up There

The NBA draft in Brooklyn last Thursday was fashion forward (not to mention the guards and centers) as the players began to establish their identities as pros.

1. Denzel Valentine
2. Juan Hernangomez
3. Malik Beasley
4. Malachi Richardson
5. Jaylen Brown
6. Domantas Sabonis
7. Brandon Ingram
8. Taurean Prince
9. Dejounte Murray
10. Cheick Diallo
11. Henry Ellenson
12. Skal Labissiere
13. Marquese Chriss
14. Kris Dunn
15. Dragan Bender
16. Caris LeVert
17. Buddy Hield
18. Buddy Hield
19. Dejounte Murray
20. Isaia Cordinier
21. Thon Maker

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INBOX

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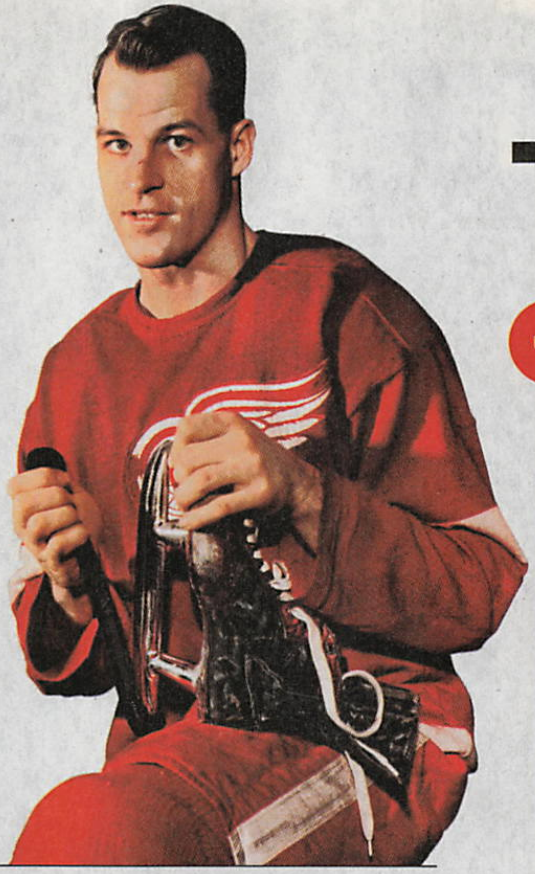

There was a third side to Gordie Howe you didn't mention *(The Two Sides of Mr. Hockey)*. He made everyone around him—Sid Abel, Ted Lindsay, Alex Delvecchio—a better player. I thought Howe deserved more than a four-page obituary. He made Detroit Hockeytown.

Epamenondas Mihas, Brownstown, Mich.

COVER

As a Bruins fan, it pains me to say that I loved seeing **Sidney Crosby** grace the cover. Too often SI passes over the Stanley Cup winner for a golfer celebrating a birdie putt on 16 or for whatever LeBron James is doing that week.

Tom Crane
Springfield, Mass.

Albert Pujols's belief that you can only compare players within periods of about 20 years is a valid one (SCORECARD). So did any player from 1921 to '61 even approach **Joe DiMaggio's streak**? George Sisler came closest with hits in 41 straight in '22. Indeed, DiMaggio's 56 remains one of the great achievements in sports.

Phil Catalano, Bradenton, Fla.

I must take issue with Tom Verducci and Stephen Jay Gould's assertion that DiMaggio's 56-game hitting streak was "the greatest factual achievement in the history of baseball." Far from it. Hitting streaks are nothing more than statistical curiosities. A batter could go 1-for-5 day after day after day, but would we really then elevate a .200 hitter to godlike status?

Andrew M. Weiss, Playa Del Rey, Calif.

PAGE 46

In reading the article about the advancements in officiating technology *(Replay Revolution)*, I disagreed with Michael Rosenberg's use of **Derrick Henry's touchdown** against Clemson as an example of an unclear call. Replay officials reviewed the play and confirmed it by clear video evidence.

Clark Puckett
Milton, Fla.

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Edited by JIM GORANT + TED KEITH

SCORECARD

COACHES CORNERED Freeze stands to bear the brunt of sanctions for violations attributed to Tunsil (right) and others.

CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES (FREEZE)

Future Tense

What the Ole Miss investigation will reveal about the rules for major-college football

BY PETE THAMEL

FOR NEARLY four years case number 189693 has trudged on without much notice. The NCAA's investigation into the Ole Miss athletic department includes allegations against the football program of academic fraud, illicit booster loans and payments, and significant extra benefits. But by shielding NCAA documents from public record and consistently downplaying the severity of the charges, the university minimized notoriety about the case.

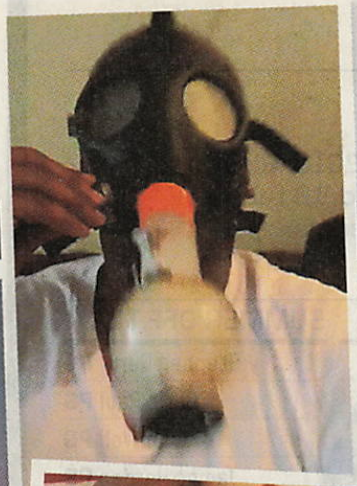
It remained that way until April 28, the day that three Mississippi players—defensive tackle Robert Nkemdiche, receiver Laquon Treadwell and left tackle Laremy Tunsil—were projected to go in the first round of the NFL draft. Ten minutes before the first pick a video of Tunsil smoking marijuana out of a gas-mask bong leaked on his Twitter account and went viral. Tunsil, the top tackle prospect and once a candidate for the No. 1 pick, lost millions as he slid to the Dolphins at No. 13. Hours later an alleged screenshot appeared on Tunsil's Instagram account showing a conversation in which he asked a Rebels associate AD for $305 to pay his family's electric and water bills. At a press conference that night, Tunsil admitted it was him in the video, and when asked if he had taken money from an Ole Miss coach, he said, "I'd have to say, yeah."

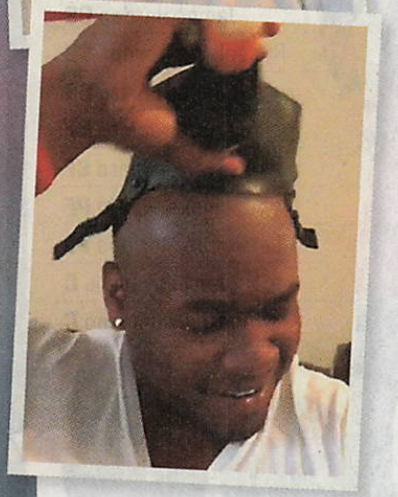
Suddenly case number 189693 was of great interest across the country—and not just for the allegations of 28 violations, 15 of which are related to women's basketball and track and field, and 13 to football. Far more important, the investigation, which will likely be concluded in 2017, is the first of a major football program that falls primarily under a new penalty structure instituted in '13.

Under the old guidelines violations were lumped into two categories, "major" or "secondary," which left room for interpretation and inconsistency. The new guidelines aim for more precision, ranging from Level I to Level IV (with I being the most severe). They also hold head coaches more accountable and try to more clearly define punishments, though there are degrees of severity within each level.

For example, an "aggravated" Level I violation could produce a four-year ban on postseason competition and a 50% scholarship reduction, while a "mitigated" Level I might get only a one-year ban and a 12.5% reduction. Ole Miss football is accused of four Level I violations under coach Hugh Freeze, and there is also a significant Level II "failure to monitor" charge—which the university is disputing.

Among coaches and administrators a theory has emerged: If Ole Miss doesn't get hit hard after fixing three ACT tests, booster malfeasance and a player's nationally televised admission of taking money, the SEC West—and many other conferences—will turn into the Wild Wild West. Even at a time when multibillion-dollar TV





contracts and escalating coaching salaries have made the public more sympathetic to the idea of player compensation and the unfairness of pursuing petty infractions, the breadth of wrongdoing in Oxford cries out for a definitive response.

"Schools continue to engage in really egregious behavior," says Jo Potuto, a former chair of the Committee on Infractions. "Is the penalty high enough that there's a calculus shift? I'm not sure we're at the point where we're hitting schools with sufficiently serious penalties."

So what will happen to Ole Miss? Freeze could be suspended, even though he hasn't been directly connected to any Level I or Level II wrongdoing. "[Does the NCAA] stick to their guns like they said a few years ago and hold the head coach accountable?" asked a veteran SEC head coach. "They need to make a damn statement, sooner or later."

Mississippi has already self-imposed penalties, taking away 11 football scholarships; limiting the recruiting responsibilities of assistant coaches Chris Kiffin and Maurice Harris; disassociating four boosters; paying a fine of $159,325; and placing itself on three years' probation.

Tyrone Thomas, a Washington, D.C., lawyer who regularly handles NCAA cases, considers those "starting points" for the penalty. Ole Miss has not fired any coaches, and the feeling around the SEC and college football is that the NCAA must go further. "Schools are probably not [going as far as] they would have under the old system," says Michael Buckner, a Sunrise, Fla., lawyer who also works NCAA cases. "Why penalize yourself when the hearing panel may not impose them?"

All three outside lawyers SI spoke to agreed that Ole Miss has been thorough in helping the NCAA's investigators, but that doesn't mean the organization will be lenient. "This is a very serious case," says Buckner. "The number of Level I violations involved [16 overall, eight in football] coupled with the number of coaches and boosters involved—those are all very serious violations that threaten the integrity of the sport." □

GO FIGURE

7

Home runs for the White Sox against the Blue Jays last Saturday, a single-game record for the 116-year-old franchise. Despite the power show, Chicago lost 10–8 to Toronto, just the third time a team dropped a game in which it hit seven homers.

$105,000

Raise for Scott Cochran, Alabama football's strength-and-conditioning coach, to $525,000, reportedly more than 22 Division I head coaches earn.

3

PGA Tour events that have been canceled in the last 20 years: the 1996 AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am, the 2009 Viking Classic and the 2016 Greenbrier Classic, which was to be held on July 7–10 in West Virginia but was called off due to massive flooding in the area.

12

Runs allowed by the Royals' Edinson Volquez last Friday while getting just three outs—he's the first starting pitcher since 1913, the earliest for which play-by-play records are available for every game, to do so.

DARREN CARROLL/GETTY IMAGES (GOLFER); ED ZURGA/GETTY IMAGES (VOLQUEZ)

OLYMPICS
+

Keep Dreamin' Team

The U.S.'s best ballers will stay home from Rio

THE MEN'S BASKETBALL TEAM that will suit up for the U.S. at the Rio Olympics is headlined by A-listers like Carmelo Anthony and Kevin Durant. It's clear, however, that this is a B team.

The roster is missing some of the game's biggest stars. Consider the completely separate team that might have represented the red, white and blue this summer *(far column)*. The actual Rio-bound squad is also less accomplished than the U.S. teams that won gold at the 2008 and '12 Games, though it looks better than the bronze medalists from '04. The following chart shows the average pretournament PERs (Player Efficiency Ratings) and Win Shares for those teams, as well as for the 2016 crew and the "All-Summer Off" team.

The U.S. should still win gold in Rio, but it may not be as easy as in years past.

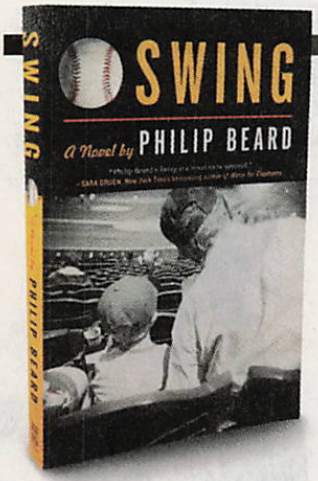
—Ben Golliver

The 12-man U.S. team includes nine 2016 All-Stars, the same number as the 2008 and '12 teams that brought home gold medals.

2016 RIO TEAM		SUMMER OFF TEAM
PG Kyrie Irving		Stephen Curry **PG**
PG Kyle Lowry		Chris Paul **PG**
SG Klay Thompson		John Wall **PG**
SG Jimmy Butler		James Harden **SG**
SG DeMar DeRozan		Russell Westbrook **SG**
SF Kevin Durant ▸		Damian Lillard **SG**
SF Paul George		◂ LeBron James **SF**
SF Harrison Barnes		Kawhi Leonard **SF**
PF Carmelo Anthony		Blake Griffin **PF**
PF Draymond Green		LaMarcus Aldridge **PF**
C DeMarcus Cousins		Anthony Davis **C**
C DeAndre Jordan		Andre Drummond **C**

	AVG. PER	AVG. WS
2016 RIO TEAM	20.7	8.9
SUMMER OFF TEAM	24.8	10.7
2012 LONDON TEAM	24.0	11.3*
2008 BEIJING TEAM	22.1	10.2
2004 ATHENS TEAM	19.8	7.7

*LOCKOUT-SHORTENED YEAR; CALCULATION BASED ON 82-GAME SEASON



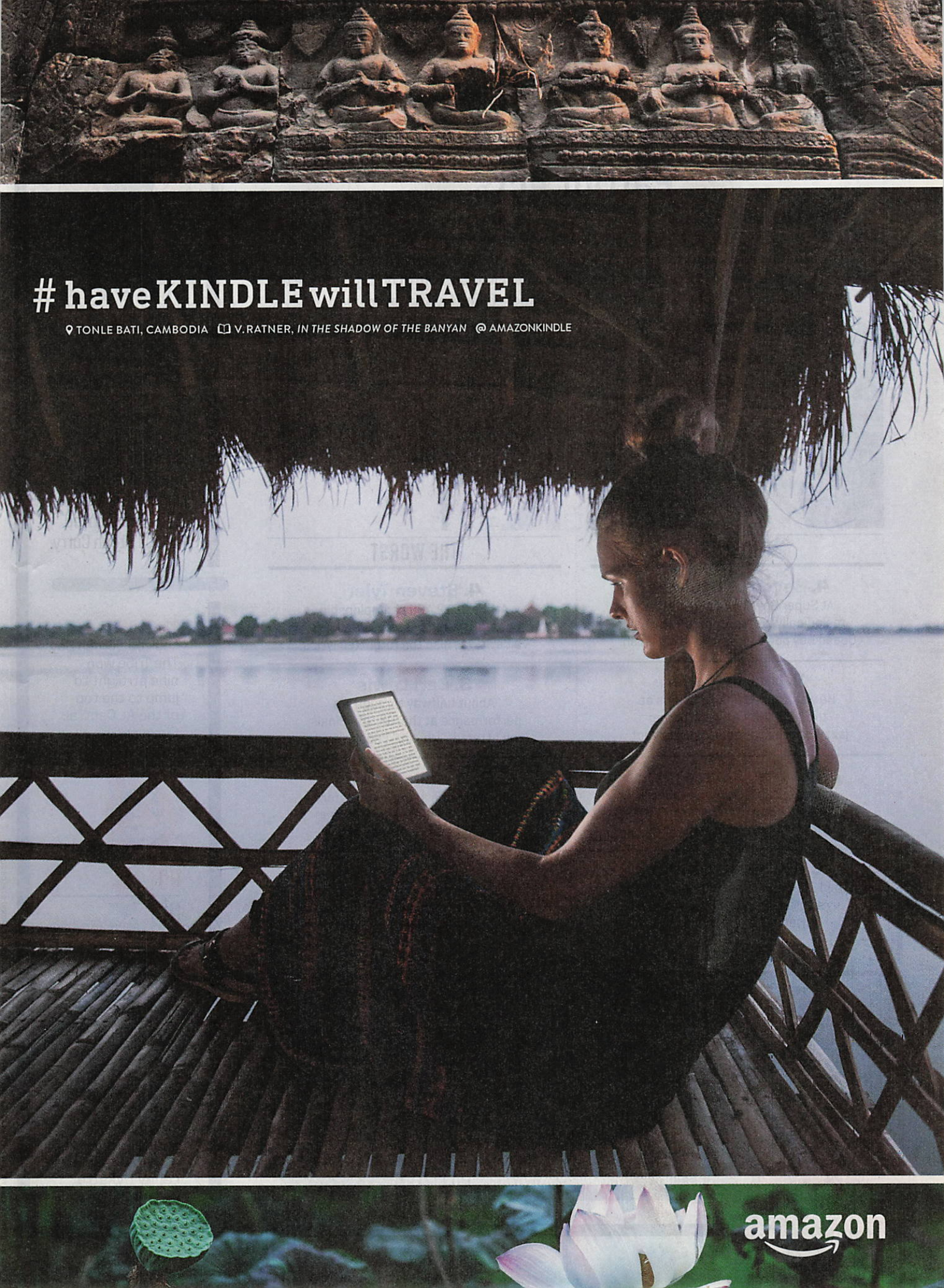
Bang for The Bucs

A new book hits home

PHILIP BEARD IS a Pittsburgh native and a recovering lawyer unable to resist the compulsion to commit prose. Beard, 53, has the audacity to hang his third novel, *Swing*, on a Korean War veteran who is missing limbs but is full of sublime surprises, "a half man who gets to live a whole life." The book begins with this indelible character coming to the aid of an 11-year-old boy unmoored by the loss of his father.

Their unlikely friendship is formed during—and made possible by—the 1971 Pirates' long-shot march to a seven-game World Series triumph over the Orioles. Beard uses baseball to bond his characters and fix us in the cultural and historical firmament, resulting in a tight, poignant coming-of-age novel. *Swing* is richly rewarding even if you can't tick off all four Orioles 20-game winners from that season; even if you didn't remember that the MVP of that Fall Classic was the magnificent Roberto Clemente, who would be dead 14 months later.

Beard's evocations of those Bucs are as artful, and as much of a pleasure, as his sure handle on relationships: between spouses, between siblings and between friends, including one between a boy and a flawed hero. It will stay with you long after you put this book down. *—Austin Murphy*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EXTRA MUSTARD

Patriot Acts

ON JUNE 4, Alan St. Louis, an engineer from Nashua, N.H., set a record by performing "The Star-Spangled Banner" 25 times in 24 hours at Boston's Shootout for Soldiers, a daylong charity lacrosse tournament. St. Louis also holds records for most public anthem renditions in a day (10) and a year (325). In honor of his achievement and the Fourth of July, here are the four best and four worst anthem performances (non-Hendrix division).

THE BEST

4. Beyoncé Knowles
At Super Bowl XLVII she started melodically but brought out the full Queen Bey power vocals for a big finish.

3. Marvin Gaye
He was backed only by drums at the 1983 NBA All-Star Game: jazzy, improvisational, note perfect.

2. Carrie Underwood
The American Idol went a cappella at Super Bowl XLIV; it might've even made Simon Cowell salute.

1. Whitney Houston
Amid 1991's Persian Gulf war, backed by swelling horns, she showed the power of playing it straight.

THE WORST

4. Steven Tyler
At the 2012 AFC championship game, it wasn't just the cracking voice, it was also the forgotten lyrics.

3. Carl Lewis
About halfway through his performance at the '93 NBA Finals, he uttered, "Uh-oh." Enough said.

2. Roseanne Barr
She was shrill and off-key before a 1990 Reds-Padres game, then added offensive gestures.

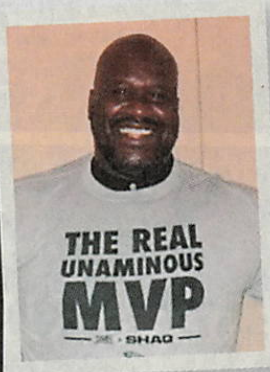
1. R. Kelly
At least Barr meant to suck; Kelly's synthesized reggae version before the Hopkins-Taylor fight in '05 just did.

THEY SAID IT

"I HAD A BAD STOMACH, SO I SIMPLY LET GO."

Adam Lindin Ljungkvist

Defender for Pershagens SK in a lower-level Swedish league, who was shown a red card for passing gas during an argument with the ref.



SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

Shaquille O'Neal, who fell one vote short of being the NBA's first unanimous MVP in 2000, attempted to troll Steph Curry.

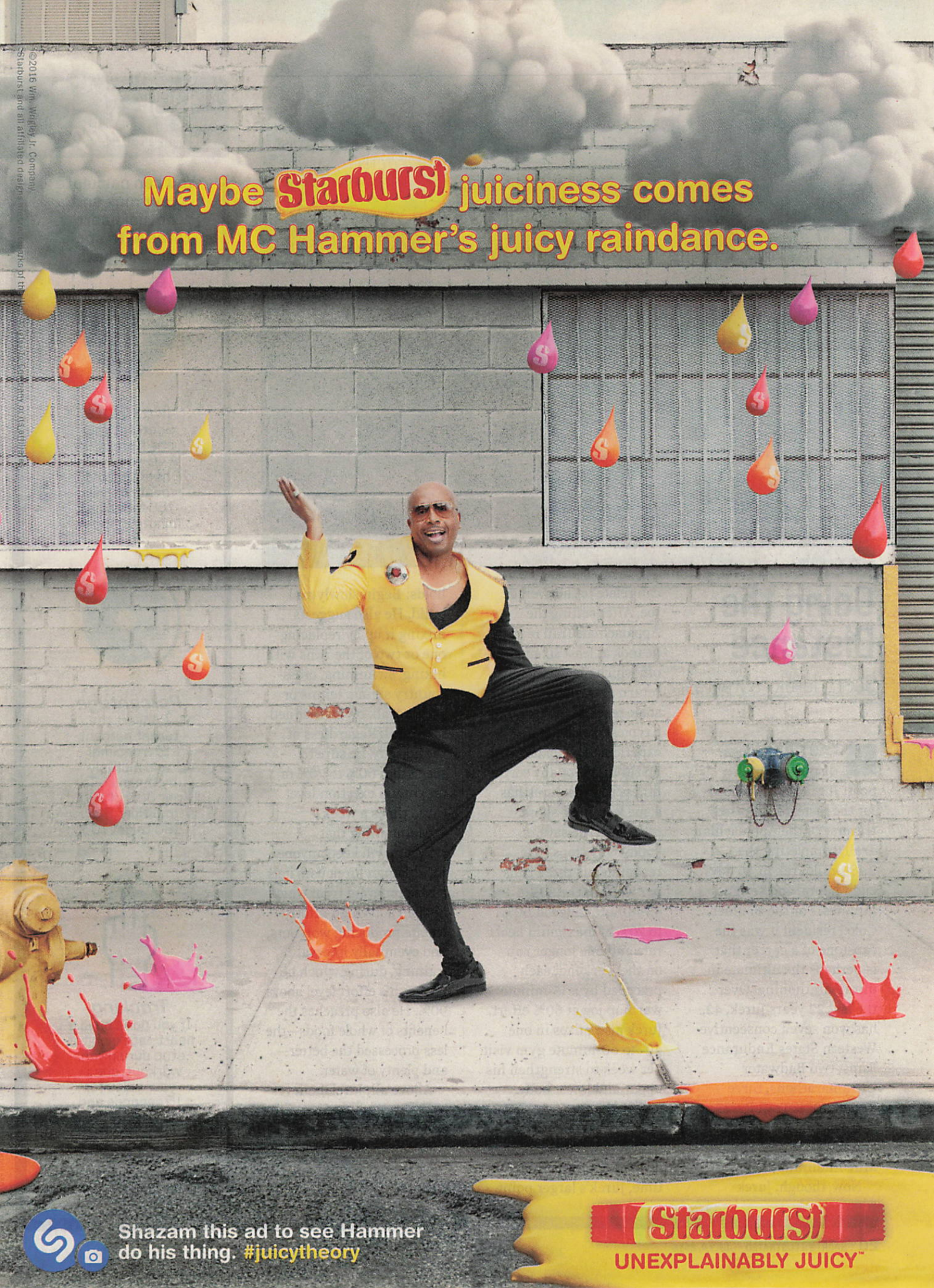
The Indians
Look out, Green Bay. The Tribe won nine straight to jump to the top of the AL Central. Cleveland = Titletown?

HOT ▲

NOT ▼

The Mets
They brought back Jose Reyes, an infielder with legal issues, eroded skills and faded power. Guess Lenny Dykstra wasn't available.

BOB ROSATO (KNOWLES); JOHN W. MCDONOUGH (BARR); @SHAQ/TWITTER (O'NEAL); TED S. WARREN/AP (REF)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ROCK STAR
While setting the AT record, Jurek paused briefly at the McAfee Knob overlook in Virginia.

Going the Distance

Scott Jurek restarts

LAST JULY mega-distance runner Scott Jurek set the record for the fastest supported traverse of the Appalachian Trail, completing the 2,189-mile trek in 46 days, eight hours, and seven minutes. For the Boulder, Colo., resident it was the capstone of a career that is perhaps the ultimate in ultramarathoning. Over the last 22 years Jurek, 42, has won seven consecutive Western States Endurance Runs, two Badwater Ultramarathons, three Miwok 100K Trail Races, the 153-mile Spartathalon and the Hardrock Hundred Mile Endurance Run.

Now, though, Jurek can relate to the average Joe. After setting the Appalachian Trail record, he took at least six months off, which means that his return to training bore some resemblance to what a typical couch potato experiences when he takes up running—or any sort of fitness routine. Jurek has some lessons to share.

To start, he says, "take baby steps." He recommends three runs per week in the 30- to 45-minute range at 60% to 70% of maximum heart rate and one longer run on the weekend, each preceded by a 15-minute warmup jog at 60% effort. Jurek also mixes in one 40- to 60-minute gym visit per week to strengthen his upper and lower body.

As baby steps go, those are rather large bounds, but even for someone who can't commit that much time, Jurek's larger point holds: Begin slowly and build. He also suggests mixing it up by replacing one or two of the runs with hiking, swimming, cross-country skiing, tennis or even a walk on an inclined treadmill. Regardless of the activity, be sure to reach that 60% to 70% of maximum exertion level three times a week.

Maintaining that program will keep anyone fit, although Jurek uses it as a base program from which he then adds high-effort lactate producing workouts, and eventually interval training, during which he pushes his effort level above 90%. He also preaches the benefits of whole foods—the less processed the better—and plenty of water.

Above all, Jurek believes in taking a relaxed approach. "Have fun with your workouts," he says, "and listen to your body."

—Joe Carberry

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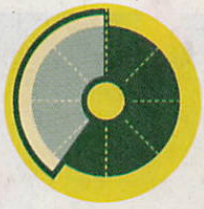
You can calculate your max and actual heart rates with some simple math

Max Rate

Subtract your age from 220. A 40-year-old's heart should beat roughly 180 times per minute at most.



Percentage

Convert the target percent to a decimal and multiply by the max. To get 60% of 180, multiply .6 by 180 to get 108.

Tracking

If you don't have a heart-rate monitor, stop during your workout, check your pulse for 15 seconds and multiply by four.

For more athlete training profiles and tips, go to ***SI.com/edge***

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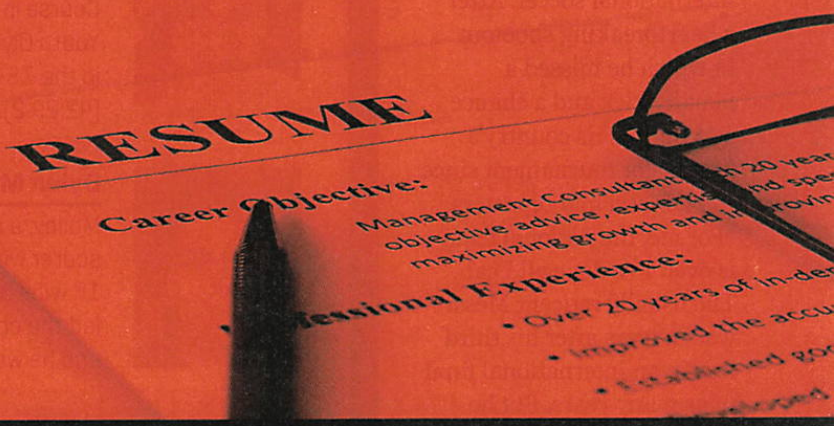

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:10 TAKE

Messi'd Up

After a championship game, the victors are usually the ones in the spotlight. That was not the case following Sunday's Copa América final in East Rutherford, N.J., where Chile beat Argentina 4–2 in penalty kicks after 120 scoreless minutes. The result was overshadowed by a postgame announcement from the world's greatest player, 29-year-old Argentine striker Lionel Messi, that he was finished with international soccer. After a heartbreaking shootout in which he missed a penalty kick and a chance at winning his country's first major tournament since 1993, Messi told reporters, "For me, the national team is over. I've done all I can." The usually reticent Messi was in tears after his third loss in an international final in as many years. But he knows that until he ends his nation's drought, the second part of his statement isn't true, so don't be surprised if the first part isn't either.

—Alexander Abnos

FACES IN THE CROWD

Edited by **ALEXANDRA FENWICK**

Rayvon Grey | *Beacon, N.Y.* | *Track and Field*

Rayvon, a recent Beacon High graduate, won the New Balance national outdoor long jump title with a leap of 24' 3½" in Greensboro, N.C. A week earlier he broke the state mark of 25' 3½"—set in 1965 by former world-record holder Bob Beamon—by jumping 25' 4¾". Rayvon also won the national indoor title (26' ¼") in March. He will compete at LSU.

Aquira DeCosta | *Stockton, Calif.* | *Basketball*

Aquira, a 6' 2" rising junior forward at St. Mary's High, scored 12 points and set a U.S. women's under-17 record with 17 rebounds in a 104–45 win over South Korea at the U-17 championships in Zaragoza, Spain. She led the Rams (28–1) to the CIF Open Division regional semifinal and averaged a team-high 15.2 points and 9.5 boards.

Eugene Hong | *Sanford, Fla.* | *Golf*

Eugene, a rising junior at the Circle Christian School in Winter Park, shot a six-under 274 to win the four-round Haas Family Invitational at Sedgefield Country Club in Greensboro, N.C., by four strokes. Last October he led the Centurions to second place in the Class 1A state tournament. Eugene has verbally committed to Florida.

Chloe Levins | *Rutland, Vt.* | *Golf, Biathlon*

Chloe, a recent Rutland High grad, shot a one-over 71 at Montague Golf Course in Randolph to win her third Division I state title. At the Winter Youth Olympics in Lillehammer, Norway, in February, she was fourth in the 7.5-kilometer biathlon pursuit (25:47.6) and sixth in the relay (42:29.2). Chloe will play golf and cross-country ski for Middlebury.

Dylan Molloy | *Setauket, N.Y.* | *Lacrosse*

Molloy, a rising senior attackman at Brown and the nation's leading scorer with 247 career points, carried the Bears to a school-record 16 wins and their first NCAA Final Four appearance since 1994. He led the country with 116 points, 54 assists and 6.44 points per game, and he won the Tewaaraton Award, college lacrosse's highest honor.

Linda Shin and Juli Raventos
Johns Creek, Ga.; San José, Costa Rica | *Tennis*

Shin, a rising senior at Williams, and Raventos, a rising junior, beat Claremont-Mudd-Scripps's Caroline Ward and Katie Kuosman 6–2, 2–6, 6–2 in Kalamazoo, Mich., to win a repeat Division III doubles title and lift the Ephs to second place.

Nominate Now ▼

To submit a candidate for Faces in the Crowd, go to **SI.com/faces**.
For more on outstanding amateur athletes, follow **@SI_Faces** on Twitter.

JUST MY TYPE

→ *Interview by* **DAN PATRICK**

BEN SIMMONS

FIRST MATE

The 19-year-old Australian, who was taken No. 1 by the 76ers in last Thursday's NBA draft, is championing a new position, one that he hopes will help him dethrone King James.

DAN PATRICK: *What position do you want to play?*

BEN SIMMONS: Point forward, for sure. It's the best position for me and my style of play. I think I can get a lot done at point forward.

DP: *Is that now an official position?*

BS: I think it's turning into a new position, but it can't be listed.

DP: *What number will you have with the Sixers?*

BS: Twenty-five. That's the family number. My dad [Dave] wore it. My brothers and sisters wore it. I'm definitely keeping it in the family.

DP: *Could you have played in the NBA right out of high school?*

BS: I would have liked to have tried.

DP: *Did going to LSU help you much?*

BS: It helped me more on the mental level, playing through adversity and learning that not everything is going to be perfect.

DP: *Why didn't you shoot more threes in college?*

BS: It was more that we already had guys shooting threes, so I didn't need to shoot as many. I can definitely shoot the ball. I wanted to make sure we got the best out of each player.

DP: *How did you guys not make the NCAA tournament?*

BS: A lot of things went into that. Players were hurt. Chemistry was broken because guys were out. Having no fluid chemistry kind of messed it up. I definitely enjoyed my time there. I wouldn't trade it for anything.

DP: *How do you answer critics who say you need to work on your shooting?*

BS: I'm working on everything right now. By the time I get to the league, I'll be a much better player than I was the other day.

DP: *When did you realize you were better than your father [an Australian National Basketball League player]?*

BS: When I was 15, I came back to Australia [from Montverde (Fla.) Academy] for a visit and finally played him in one-on-one and beat him.

DP: *How was dinner that night at home?*

BS: It was good. *[Laughs.]* He knew it was time to hand it over.

DP: *When's the last time you talked to LeBron James?*

BS: Last night [on FaceTime] at my draft get-together.

DP: *What did he say?*

BS: He congratulated me, and I told him I was looking forward to finally matching up against him.

DP: *What did he say about that?*

BS: He [showed me his] camera, and it was a picture of the championship trophy. I couldn't say anything back.

DP: *Whose poster did you have in your bedroom growing up?*

BS: I had a banner of Allen Iverson hanging on my door.

DP: *Have you talked to Iverson yet?*

BS: Not yet. I can't wait for that, to talk to him and get some pointers on how it's done. □

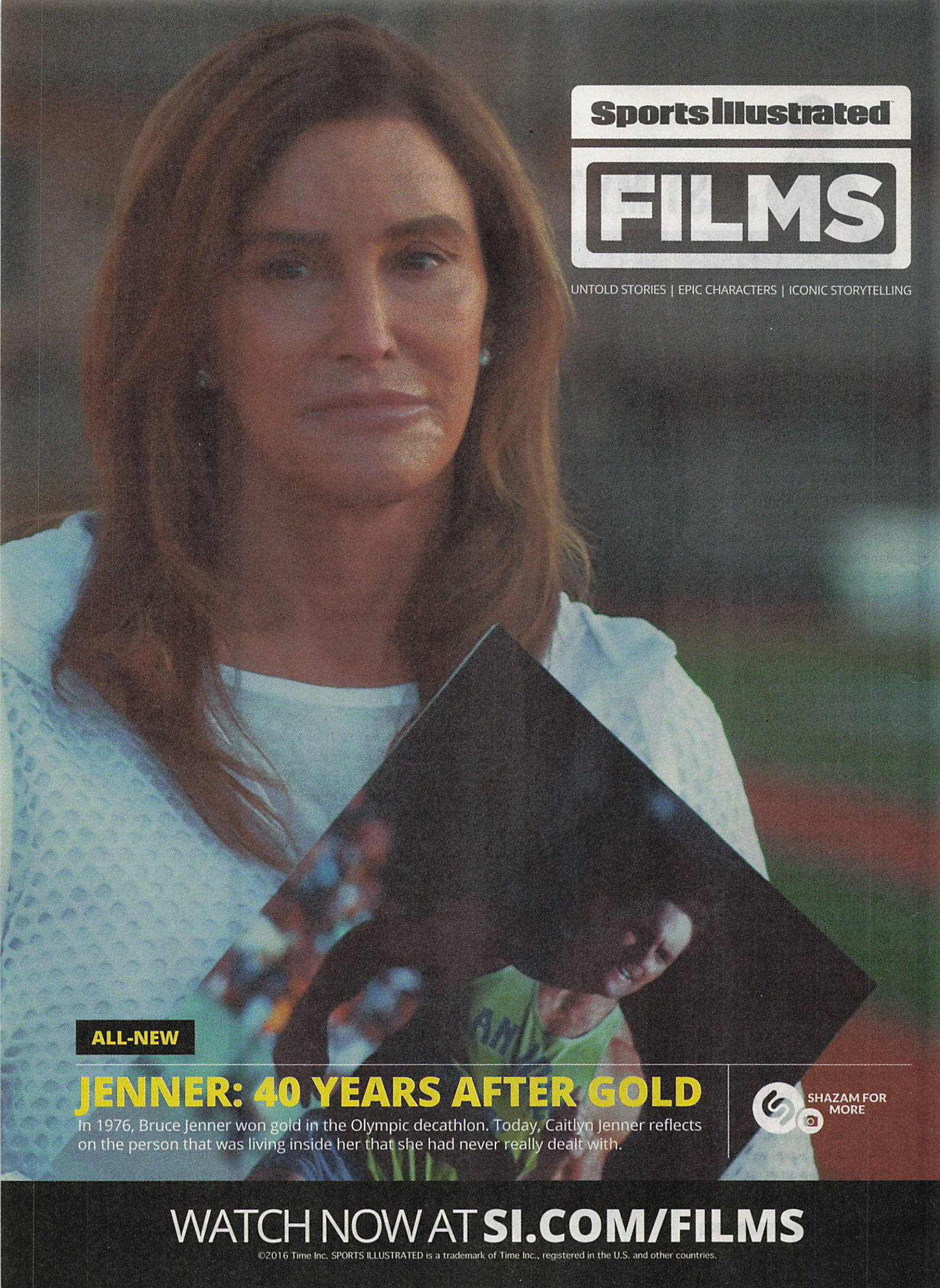
GUEST SHOTS

SAY WHAT?

Cavaliers forward **Richard Jefferson** is thinking about retiring, though he said that might thwart his next career move. "I told [Lakers coach] Luke Walton that I needed a job," the 36-year-old Jefferson explained. "He told me, 'If you retire, you're an idiot, and I can't have idiots on my staff.' " . . .

I asked Hornets assistant coach **Patrick Ewing** to name the worst part about working for team owner Michael Jordan. "Since we've been 18, he's always been the same person," Ewing told me. "Always talking trash, picking at you, [saying] you've never beat me." . . . ESPN's **Jay Bilas** filled me in on

NBA draft clichés: "There's draft-and-stash [drafting an international player and keeping him abroad for at least a season] and three-and-D [three-point shooters who excel on defense]. We should really just go with, 'Can he shoot it?' "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The Case for . . .

Getting Schooled

BY DAVID GARDNER

ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

ONE HEADLINE THE NBA hopes you'll note from last week's draft is the large number of international prospects who were chosen. Like his predecessor, David Stern, commissioner Adam Silver is ambitious to grow the game globally. To Silver, seeing a record 14 foreign-born prospects selected in the first round—and 26, also a new mark, of the 60 picks—was surely an opportunity to rejoice. To others, it became the latest chance to bash college basketball.

For years the deriders have looked for signs of the college game's decline. In 2008, when Brandon Jennings decided to spend a season in Europe rather than at a U.S. college, he was presented in outlets like *The New York Times* and ESPN as a pioneer, blazing a new path to the NBA. Yet in the years since only Emmanuel Mudiay—who signed with SMU before he deferred to play in China in '14—has followed the same route. In 2010–11 there were 376 foreign-born players competing in Division I basketball. Last season that number was 506. That growth is due at least in part to the brighter spotlight that shines on college players, the better for NBA scouts and decision makers to see them.

Since 2006, when the NBA began requiring players to be at least 19 in the calendar year of the draft and a year removed from high school, 660 players have been selected. Of those, 521—an average of 47.4 out of 60 picks each draft, or 78.9%—have come from the NCAA. Though the 44 college players selected this year were the fewest ever, 11 of the 14 lottery picks were collegians. The NCAA remains the clearest path to the NBA.

That's true even when players don't need to go to school to catch the league's attention. Number 1 pick Ben Simmons, a native of Melbourne, Australia, was already starring for his national team as a high school sophomore. Because he would turn 19 before the end of the year in which the draft was held, Simmons could have declared for the 2015 draft if he had stayed Down Under. Instead he came to the U.S. for his last three years of high school before spending a season at LSU, for whom he averaged 19.2 points and 11.8 rebounds. Similarly Jamal Murray, who turned 19 in February, would have been eligible for this year's draft even if he hadn't reclassified and graduated from high school in '15. The Ontario native opted for Kentucky, where he set a Wildcats' freshman record by averaging 20.0 points per game before becoming the No. 7 pick in the draft, by the Nuggets.

Eleven of the 14 picks in this year's lottery came out of U.S. colleges, a reminder that the **NCAA is still the surest path to the NBA.**

For many prospects, college hoops remains the only realistic route to the NBA. Oklahoma's Buddy Hield, the No. 6 pick, by New Orleans, grew up without a developmental system in his home country of the Bahamas. He came to the U.S. for college, where he went from being a 23.8% three-point shooter as a freshman in 2012–13 to a 45.7% marksman as a senior in '15–16, as well as the Wooden Award winner as national player of the year. Jakob Poeltl, the No. 9 pick, by Toronto, became the first Austrian-born NBA player—after spending two seasons at Utah. Domantas Sabonis *(left)*, the No. 11 pick by Orlando, was born in the U.S. as the son of Lithuanian legend Arvydas Sabonis but raised in Spain. He was a three-star recruit when he arrived at Gonzaga in '14 but muscled his way into the lottery after two strong seasons—and a memorable 19-point, 10-rebound performance in this year's NCAA tournament against Poeltl's Utes.

DraftExpress.com, a leading draft site, has already released a mock draft for next year; 23 of the 30 first-round picks and 45 out of 60 selections overall are projected to come from the college ranks, including expected No. 1 Harry Giles of Duke. So if you're hoping to get a glimpse of tomorrow's NBA stars, there's no need to relocate to Europe. Just turn on your TV (or phone or laptop) from November to April and give it the old college try. □

ON THE GRILL

THE SCIENCE OF THE SMOKER

At Joe's in Kansas City the barbecue is engineered to perfection.

KANSAS CITY IS A PLACE FOR CHAMPIONS, BOTH ON THE baseball diamond and at the barbecue pit. Nowhere is that more apparent than Joe's Kansas City, considered by most to be the best barbecue in a town known for it—with the hardware to back it up. Founders Jeff and Joy Stehney got their start roasting barbecue tournaments with their team, the Slaughterhouse Five, and brought that spirit to their restaurant.

"I think they're pretty competitive people," says Joe's chef Cary Taylor, "and they wanted to make sure they were doing it better than everybody in the best barbecue city in the country."

KC-style BBQ includes everything from brisket and burnt ends to chicken and—especially—pork. Joe's employs a scientific approach with their pork, which incorporates the temperature of the fire as much as the temperature and humidity of outside air. Joe's achieves pork perfection with overnight smokes, choice pieces of meat and an optimal mix of lean meat, fat and coppa—the "money muscle" in BBQ parlance, since it is often the key to winning competitions.

JOE'S SMOKES 100 OR MORE PORK BUTTS OVERNIGHT, EVERY DAY, AT EACH LOCATION.

If you can't make it to Kansas City to experience Joe's yourself, chef Cary implores you to replicate the process at home on your kettle grill or smoker. Don't worry too much about rubs and sauces, which distract from the star of the show: pork.

"It's pretty critical for it to be a bone-in pork butt," says Taylor. "There are a zillion different kinds of rubs that could be used. Just put the rub all over and then make sure that it's away from the direct heat."

Build the fire on one side of the grill or smoker, and keep the pork butt on the other side, underneath the vent, so smoke will flow toward the meat. Don't forget the drip pan underneath the pork, since fat drippings will cause flare-ups in the fire, which you should keep between 225 and 250 degrees. A nine-pound shoulder takes 6-8 hours, but feel it first—at Joe's the pit masters feel the meat to make sure the collagen and muscle tissue have broken down for the ultimate texture and taste.

The next step may involve an anatomy lesson. Coppa is most often found, well, at an Italian deli, dry-cured and piled on crusty bread. But it takes your pulled pork to the next level.

"That is just the most perfect part of the pig," says Taylor.

Ask your butcher to point it out for you, and then make sure to separate it out and mix it with the leaner pork. Don't let too much fat get into your final mix, since the coppa is plenty flavorful already—just ask barbecue champs.

"If I ever going start a competitive barbecue team," says Taylor, "It's going to be called the Money Muscle."

Slaughterhouse Five versus the Money Muscle would be a barbecue competition for the ages—and no matter who wins, everyone feasts.

COURTESY OF JOE'S KANSAS CITY BBQ

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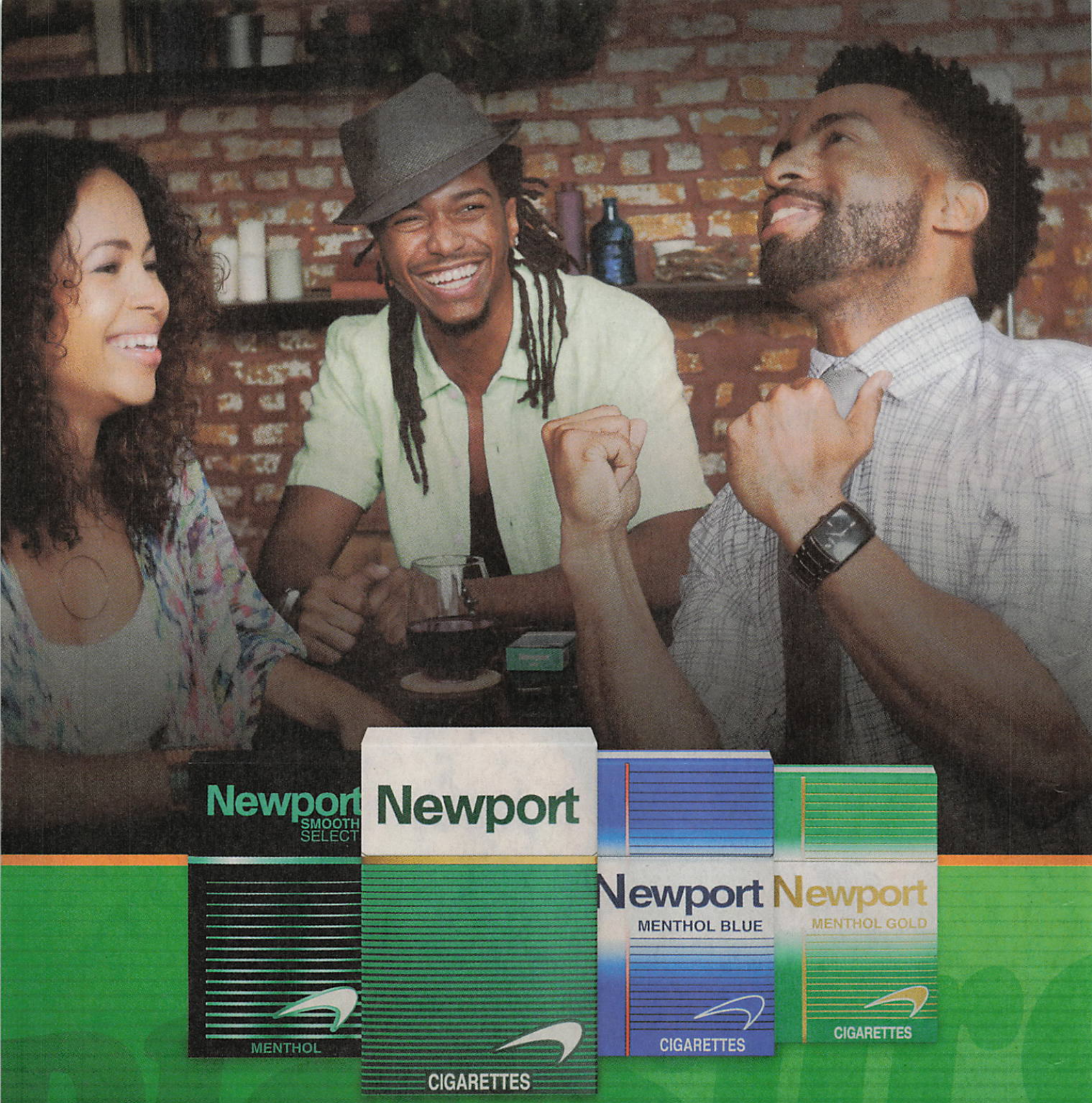

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WHERE » ARE » THEY » NOW?

SPORTS ILLUSTRATED
JULY 4–11, 2016

CAITLYN JENNER *(30)* RICK MIRER & DREW BLEDSOE *(42)*
KEN GRIFFEY JR. *(48)* FLOYD LANDIS *(58)* CHUCK LIDDELL *(64)*
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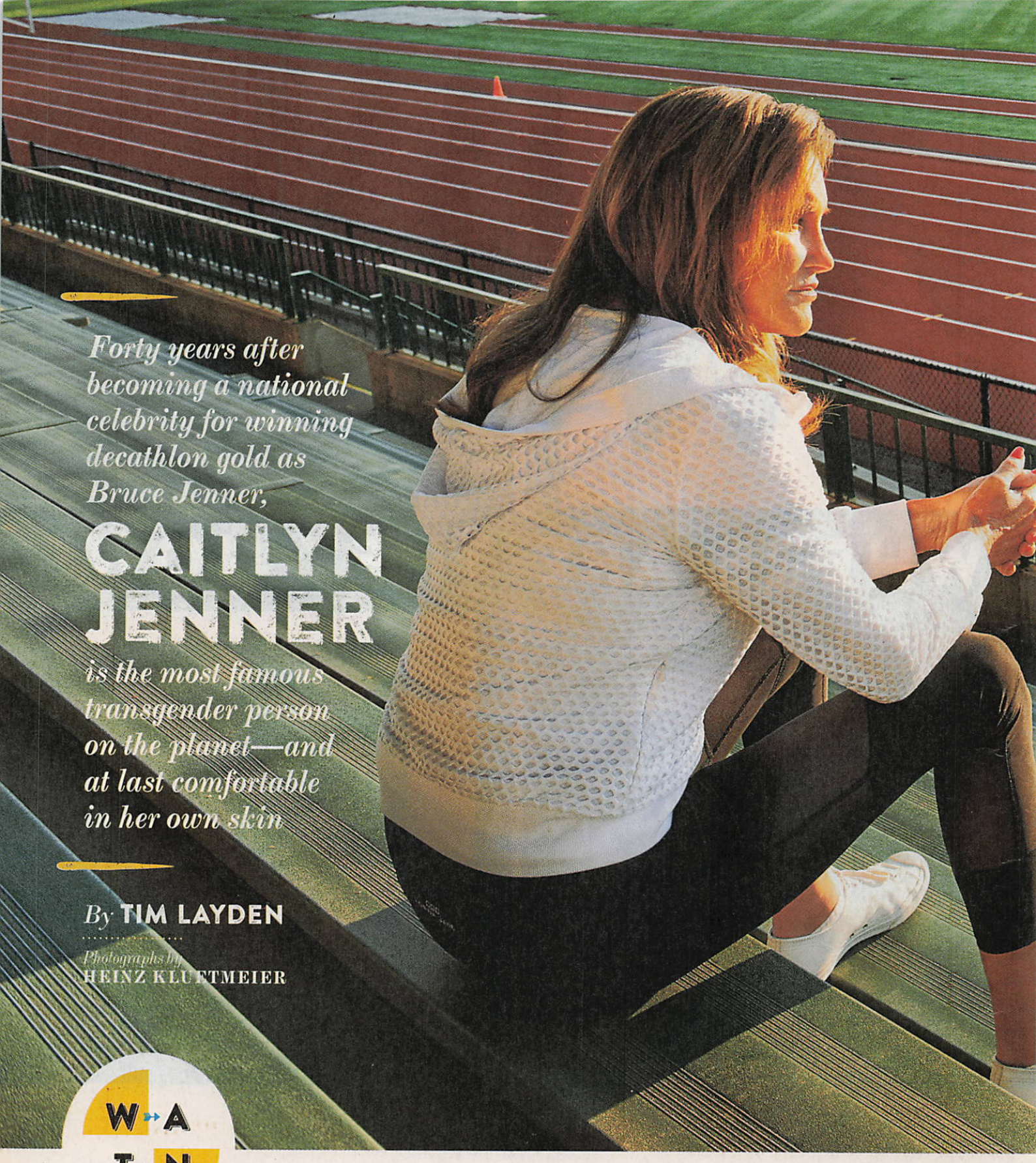

Forty years after becoming a national celebrity for winning decathlon gold as Bruce Jenner,

CAITLYN JENNER

is the most famous transgender person on the planet—and at last comfortable in her own skin

By **TIM LAYDEN**

Photographs by **HEINZ KLUETMEIER**

W A T N

AN AMERICAN H

C'mere."

From a tall, upholstered stool in the kitchen of her hilltop Malibu home, Caitlyn Jenner stands and smacks my shoulder with her right hand while swiveling her chin toward a hallway. Her shoulder-length brown hair flips hurriedly across her face, as if in pursuit. She takes a few long strides, turns left and walks through her bedroom-sized closet, into the bathroom and to a vanity, with two stacks of lightbulbs flanking a mirror. She bends to open the middle of three drawers, where a white plastic, zippered cosmetics case decorated with a pattern of a woman's lips sits on top. She snatches the case and tosses it onto the vanity and retrieves the item below, a wooden box stained dark red, wrapped in a brown leather sleeve and embossed with the logo of the 1976 Summer Olympic Games.

"Here it is," says Jenner. "In my nail drawer. That's what you can say: It was in the nail drawer."

Jenner has been performing in public for much of her adult life; she understands the impact of spoken words, the way they make some people smile and others seethe, the way they peel back layers, eliciting affirmation or exposing intolerance. Most of her words do this, especially now, as do most of her actions, including drawing breath.

The 66-year-old Jenner slides off the sleeve and flips open the lid, revealing the gold medal she earned 40 years ago for winning the Olympic decathlon, with a score that would be competitive for a place on the 2016 U.S. team to be selected this week. (Think about that.) The medal is imperfectly round, with rough, sculpted edges, nestled in felt and attached to a metal chain. It's the same chain that was draped around

PERSPECTIVE In April, Jenner returned to Tracktown USA—Eugene (left)—a crucial stop along the journey to Montreal.

Jenner's neck on the night of July 30, 1976, at the Olympic Stadium in Montreal, the same medal that Jenner lightly kissed before turning and seeing the American flag raised and hearing "The Star-Spangled Banner." Now as quickly as she had retrieved and displayed the medal, she snaps the box shut, wraps the sleeve around it, drops it back in the nail drawer and sets the plastic case on top.

Jenner has a complex relationship with the medal in the bathroom, in the drawer, in the box beneath the plastic case. It commemorates extraordinary work that allowed her to withstand the pain of what is now called gender dysphoria but then was seldom talked about at all.

Jenner understands the power of the image. "It's a picture that brings attention to this issue," she says.

"THAT'S WHY I WORE THE MEDAL."

"The decathlon," she says, "was the perfect distraction."

A decathlon victory is a rare achievement—there are only 22 Olympic gold medalists (12 American)—but to Jenner it can at times feel insignificant. It represents one of the greatest moments of her life, yet her life is different now. "Sports. It's not real life," she says. "You go out there, you work hard, you train your ass off, win the Games. I'm very proud of that part of my life. And it's not like I just want to throw it out. It's part of who I am. What I'm dealing with now, this is about who you are as a human being. What did I do for the world in 1976, besides maybe getting a few people to exercise a little bit? I didn't make a difference in the world."

The medal has been sometimes in a drawer and sometimes in a safe, but never on display. Years passed when she didn't even look at it. "The medal," says Jenner. And then she shrugs. "It was great for the kids at show-and-tell."

IT'S TRUE: the Olympic Games are play, and life is real. A medal rewards great achievement, but ultimately it's just a paperweight. But. But. But: What if there is no medal? If there is no medal, a 26-year-old athlete named Bruce Jenner, who presents and competes as male (but even then, and long before, feels strongly that he is female), does not leave Montreal famous, does not get stopped on the streets of New York City for autographs, does not become a (useful) broadcaster and (painfully bad but well-paid) actor, does not become comfortably wealthy (and eventually not, and then wealthy again). If there is no medal, Jenner probably does not, after two divorces, marry Kris Kardashian in 1991 and become a player in one of the most popular reality television series in history. If there is no medal, Jenner does not, at 65, attract an audience of more than 17 million for a prime-time special in April 2015 when she announces to ABC's Diane Sawyer that she will soon complete the transition to living as a woman; and does not, two months later, pose languorously on the cover of Vanity Fair in a corseted silk bodysuit and on the day of its release accumulate more than one million Twitter followers in four hours—faster than President Obama, the previous record holder. If there is no medal, she does not launch her own reality series on E! network last July, *I Am Cait*, which details her life in transition.

If there is no medal, Caitlyn Jenner almost certainly does not become the most famous transgender person in history. She does not become a towering (literally, 6' 4" in heels) public figure who both unifies and polarizes (even within the trans community) while spurring discussion of gender issues in ways that no one else has. She has used her celebrity—earnestly, sometimes naively, on a steep learning curve, with millions watching—to help the 700,000 trans men, women and children in America who battle not only intolerance but also suicidal thoughts, depression and poverty at staggering rates and who are just gaining a foothold in society. "I feel like, now, nobody can say they don't know a transgender person, because she is that famous," says Chris Mosier, 35, a transgender male triathlete who represented the U.S. at the world sprint duathlon (cycling and running) championships last month in Spain. "She has brought about this awareness among people who are attuned to pop culture and media. Challenges that trans people face have really come to light since she's come out."

If there is no medal, she does not affect the lives of thousands of families trying to find their way in a trans world that many scarcely knew existed. Says Dr. Johanna Olson-Kennedy, adolescent medicine specialist in the care of gender nonconforming children and transgender youth at Children's Hospital Los Angeles, "For parents who are scared or nervous about having a child come out as transgender, it suddenly feels like they're not the only one,

NEIL LEIFER

TRUE METTLE
At her home in Malibu, Jenner usually keeps her gilded souvenir from the Games—famously celebrated with Chrystie (opposite)—buried in a bathroom drawer.

because they remember Caitlyn from the Olympics, and this is real. And for the kids, if they know Caitlyn at all, it's from the Kardashians, but for them, their life is impacted by their parents' being more open to their journey. It's a lot easier for them if they have affirming and supportive parents."

If there is no medal, an April video of Jenner using the women's bathroom at Trump Tower in New York City and afterward saying, "By the way, Ted [Cruz], nobody got molested," does not get viewed 2.5 million times in five days. The video was a response to a North Carolina law that requires people to use the public bathroom that corresponds to the gender assigned to them at birth, regardless of how they identify. "It's a ridiculous law," she says.

If there is no medal, Jenner does not pose on the cover of this magazine, a few weeks shy of 40 years since her last SPORTS ILLUSTRATED cover, in which Bruce Jenner was captured crossing the finish line in Montreal, letting loose a triumphant scream. She does not put the medal around her neck, in public, for the first time since the Olympic Games. It is a startling pose that delivers two messages. The first lands softly, celebrating an aging sports hero on the anniversary of a proud moment. The second hits more force-

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fully, a transgender American, thanking her country for its tolerance, and asking for more. Jenner understands the power of the image. "It's a picture that brings attention to this issue," she says. "That's the important thing. That's why I wore the medal."

If there is no medal, there is none of this. "If I had not won the Games, if I was not on the Wheaties box and I hadn't become this, um, this . . . celebrity, would all of this have happened?" asks Jenner. She pauses. Jenner gave speeches for four decades as Bruce, and now for a year as Caitlyn. When off script, though, she speaks less decisively. "Certainly life would have been different. The gender issues, I was never getting away from. But things would have been different. I would hope I would be doing some of the things I'm doing today, but certainly not on the same scale."

» EXCLUSIVE: *Four decades after Montreal, Jenner reflects on life then and now.*

SI.COM/FILMS

BUT JENNER DID WIN THE medal, and it now becomes one of the most significant gold medals that any American has won, a trinket that could effect change and save lives. On July 29 and 30 of the Bicentennial summer, in a city just 40 miles north of the U.S. border, Jenner scored personal bests in seven of the decathlon's 10 events, broke his own world record with a mark that would have won a medal in seven of nine subsequent Olympics and taken gold in three, and prevailed by a margin that has been exceeded just once. Jenner was transformed into the type of American sports hero who no longer exists, a homespun, gosh-darn conqueror of evil Soviets (precursor to the hard-nosed, apple-cheeked hockey players who would arrive four years later in Lake Placid). He hugged the beautiful wife who had helped support him, waved a little American flag on a stick that was thrust upon him by a spectator and refused to lie on the ground in decathlete's exhaustion.

ABC put together a minidocumentary that aired a day later. It opens with Jenner running off the final curve of the 400 meters, the last event on the first day of the decathlon, to the familiar and comforting voice of broadcaster Jim McKay. Nearly seven minutes later it ends with Jenner walking down the backstretch in his red USA singlet and shiny blue shorts, pumping both fists at the sky while McKay intones:

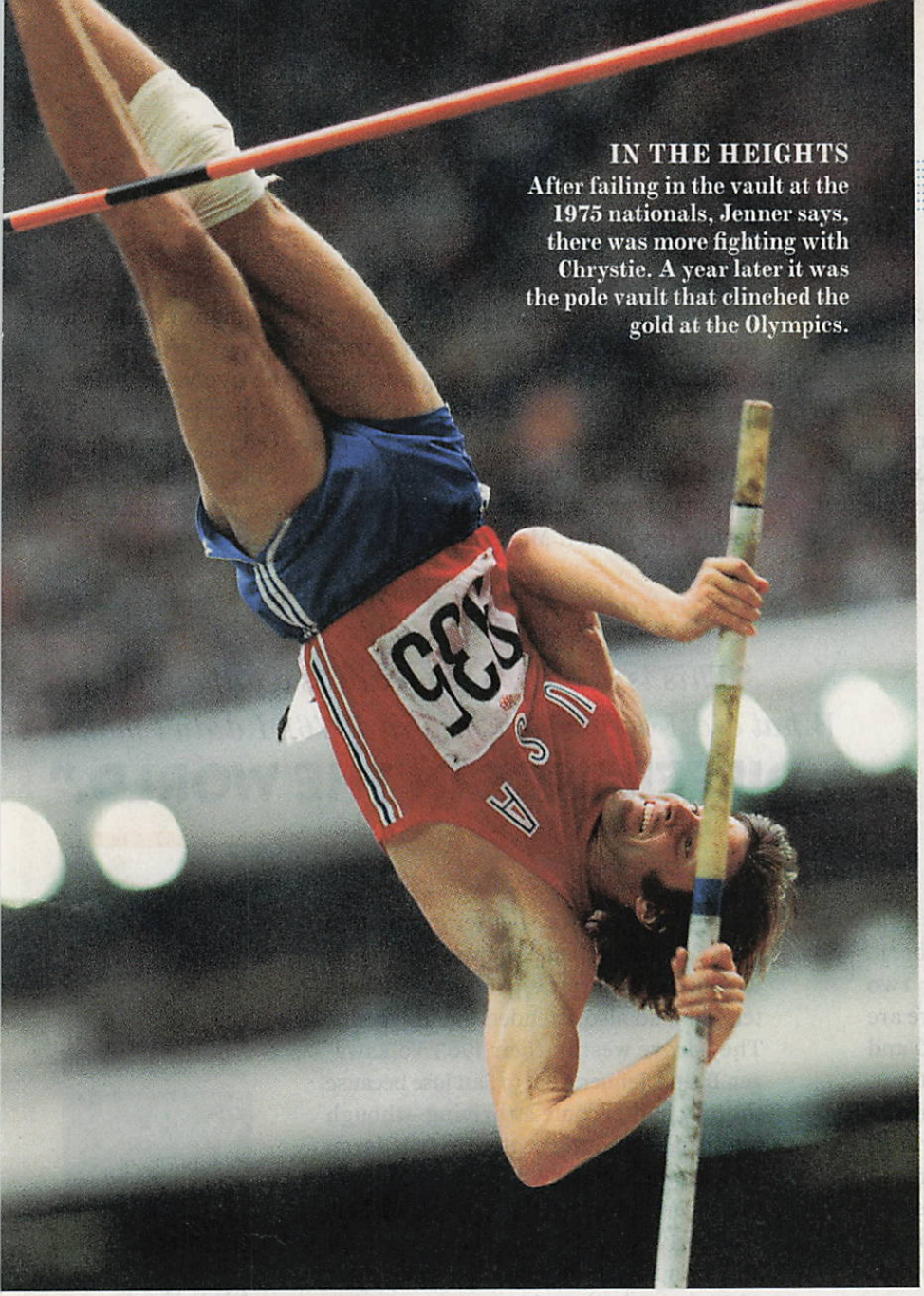
"This is an American moment, this time for a Bicentennial summer. Jenner looks ready for another event. . . ."

The 1976 Olympics were produced by ABC impresario Roone Arledge, the godfather of "up close and personal" coverage. "Roone knew stardom when he saw it," says veteran broadcaster Al Michaels, who joined ABC Sports in 1976 but was not in Montreal. "Olga Korbut, Mark Spitz, Nadia Comaneci. And Bruce Jenner. And Roone milked the hell out of stardom." Jenner was Captain America.

Jill Soloway, 50, creator and executive producer of the Emmy Award–winning Amazon series *Transparent*, whose central character is a transgender woman in her late 60s (who, like both Soloway's father and Jenner, transitioned late in life), watched the Montreal Olympics, at age 10, at her family's home in Chicago. "The most significant thing to me about 1976," says Soloway, who has become friends with Jenner, "is that she was an American hero. And it wasn't just about an Olympic medal, it was about an Olympic medal in the most American of years. You think about the gold medal and flag and running shorts, and you have that image in your heart. To not support Caitlyn now is, in some ways, a destruction of a part of you that believes in a certain ideal of American heroism."

On that Friday, Jenner stepped into an exalted place in U.S. sports history. Yet, for her, it was very much about the consuming passion that was about to be left behind, and the uncertainty that lay ahead. "For those two days in July of 1976, I was the best in the world at what I did," says Jenner. "On the other hand, the decathlon was my best friend, and that was over. I lost my beard."

A word here about pronouns and first names, about which the transgender community is understandably sensitive. Last spring, in the wake of Jenner's announcing her transition, GLAAD (formerly an acronym for the Gay and Lesbian Alliance against Defamation but now simply the organization's title, representative of a broader mission that includes transgender people) issued a series of guidelines, including one that Jenner be referred to as *Caitlyn* or *she* or *her*, even in reference to the events of 1976. Most transgender people choose to leave their pretransition life—and name—far behind. Jenner, however, often talks about Bruce. "Caitlyn doesn't mind," says Nick Adams, director of programs, transgender media for GLAAD, and a transgender male. "She has this world of fame in her past. The fact that it



IN THE HEIGHTS
After failing in the vault at the 1975 nationals, Jenner says, there was more fighting with Chrystie. A year later it was the pole vault that clinched the gold at the Olympics.

HEINZ KLUETMEIER

doesn't grate on her like it does most trans people is unique." With Jenner's approval, in this story, the historical figure who won the gold medal in 1976 is referred to as Bruce and with male pronouns. The woman who lives now as Caitlyn is referenced with female pronouns.

1976 JENNER'S PATH TO MONTREAL BEGAN AS A freshman at Sleepy Hollow (N.Y.) High, in a suburb on the Hudson River 30 miles north of New York City. He excelled at football and basketball before gravitating to the pole vault. It is an event that demands the courage to throw yourself upside down into the air while bending a long fragile stick; it's the most dangerous and harrowing of events, with a high risk of serious injury. But Jenner had worked for his father, a tree surgeon; he was fearless, and quickly successful. The family moved to Newtown, Conn.—46 years later the site of the Sandy Hook school shootings—when Bruce was a junior, and he won the state title that year with a vault of 12' 6" and again as a senior, in 1968, clearing 12' 9", more than respectable for the time. He won the state high jump title too in '68 and dabbled in the long jump and javelin.

At 19, the 6' 2", 180-pound Jenner might have been a useful Division II or III football or basketball player, but he was dyslexic, with poor grades and little confidence in the classroom. There were no scholarship offers until the summer after graduation. A rival high school coach from Connecticut reached out to L.D. Weldon, the crusty track and field coach at tiny Graceland College in southern Iowa. Weldon, who was 60 at the time, had coached 20-year-old Jack Parker to a bronze medal in the decathlon at the 1936 Olympics. Weldon died in 1989, but five years earlier he told *The Los Angeles Times* that he heard "about this boy who could high-jump 6' 2", throw the javelin 185 feet and pole-vault 13' 6". I figured he had possibilities."

It took a full year in Lamoni, Iowa, including a knee injury playing football and a season on the basketball team, before Jenner came fully to Weldon. But once Jenner tried the decathlon, progression was extraordinarily swift; in his first full competition (the first decathlon he had *seen*)—the 1970 Drake Relays—he finished sixth, in a field of Olympic hopefuls, with a school-record 6,991 points. A year later he was second with 7,402 points. And a year after that the 22-year-old Jenner stunned the track and field community by earning a place on the 1972 Olympic team with a third-place finish at the trials in Eugene, Ore. He was 11th after the first day and fifth with only the 1,500 meters remaining. He flipped through the pages of the decathlete's scoring book and calculated that he needed to beat Steve Gough, who was then in third place, by 18 seconds. "My heart was beating so hard I started getting pins and needles in my hands and feet," says Jenner. "I decided, I'm going to make this team if I gotta f------ crawl

across the line." Jenner, wearing a scruffy Fu Manchu, ran a personal best by eight seconds and beat Gough by 22.

"That was the greatest athletic moment of my life, even better than the Games in '76," says Jenner now. "I never thought I could do something like that. But when the time came to dig down really deep, there was something there. And it never left me after that race." There were other benefits too. Decathlete Harry Marra, who had not qualified for the trials but attended as a spectator, recalls seeing Jenner standing on a second-floor dormitory catwalk a few hours after the race surrounded by free shoes and athletic clothing. "Harry!" said Jenner. "Look at this free stuff."

It was during those two days that Jenner's decathlon persona was born. The competition is spread over two days, five events on each one. There are three flat running events (100, 400 and 1,500 meters), three throws (shot put, discus and javelin), three jumps (long jump, high jump and pole vault) and the 110-meter hurdles. Jenner was an exceptional athlete (he had been a waterskiing champion as a teenager too) who would pack a muscular 200 pounds on that 6' 2" frame. But he was not naturally fast or explosive in the way that many other U.S. decathlon gold medalists have been. Ashton Eaton (2012), Dan O'Brien (1996), Bill Toomey (1968) and Milt Campbell (1956) are, or were, exceptional at some combination of sprinting, hurdling and long jumping. "Bruce was actually a slowish guy for a world-class decathlete," says Frank Zarnowski, 73, a decathlon expert, announcer and guru for more than four decades and a friend of Jenner's since 1971. "He had to squeeze every point out of every event."

It is the long way to decathlon gold. Jenner would have to beat the event into submission with training and consistency, which fed Jenner's inclination toward obsessiveness. "My greatest asset was my brain," Jenner says. "I will outwork you, and I will perform under pressure."

In this way the decathlon was perfect. With so many events, the training is endless. "Twenty-four seven, 365," says Fred Samara, 66, who was Jenner's training partner in the two years before Montreal. "I was just looking at my workout book from 1975. There is a training entry in there for Thanksgiving Day. There's an entry for Christmas Day. And there's an entry for January 1. And Bruce was with me for every one of those." The routine was perfect for Jenner. More on that later.

"This is about who you are as a human being. What did I do for the world in 1976? I didn't make **A DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD."**

In 1973, a year or so after graduation from Graceland, Jenner moved to San Jose with his wife, Chrystie, a minister's daughter who had also attended the university. They drove west in their 1963 Volkswagen Beetle. Jenner went to San Jose because the city had become a thriving—though unofficial—training center for two dozen athletes with Olympic aspirations. Many of them were throwers, like discus men Mac Wilkins (who would win gold in Montreal) and John Powell (bronze) and shot-putter Al Feuerbach (fourth). Samara and his wife lived three doors down the hall from the Jenners and their new dog, a yellow Lab named Bertha. Chrystie got a job as a flight attendant with United Airlines, which would be the couple's primary source of income; Bruce earned $700 a month selling life insurance, a job on which he spent little time. These were the days when professional athletes were still barred from the Games.

THE WAY IN SAN JOSE
Jenner found success after learning from Samara (top) and Wilkins.

Jenner did not have a coach. He was confident that he could train himself in sprints and distance. He kept a hurdle in the living room, a detail that made its way into nearly every story written about him during the run-up to Montreal. As for the other events, "if I needed help with my discus, I would go to Mac Wilkins," says Jenner. "If I needed help in the shot, I would ask Al Feuerbach."

The athletes who trained with Jenner before the '76 Olympics remember an earnest, agreeable workaholic. Of course they were all workaholics. "Bruce was just one of the guys," says Wilkins, 65, who still coaches U.S. throwers. "He would come around the throwing ring, and I would tease him, 'Hey, here comes the world's best average athlete.' As a thrower, his skill level was pretty good. It just

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HEADING WEST
After 1972, Jenner left Graceland for the fertile training ground of California.

doesn't go very far because he weighs, like, 200 pounds. But he had nine other events, and we understood that." (Jenner threw the discus farther in Montreal than any other decathlete—and farther than any decathlete in 2012—and finished second in the shot put.)

The San Jose crew would gather several times every week for weight training at the Central YMCA. These were intense sessions; throwers are often powerful lifters. In fact, Feuerbach won his division in the U.S. powerlifting championships. "I can picture Bruce perfectly in those sessions," says Feuerbach, 68, who had a long career as a sound engineer with *60 Minutes* and NFL Films. "I might be on the platform with 400 pounds on the bar, and Bruce would get right up there, and we'd help him knock it back to 285, which is still impressive. It was ballsy for him to get up there. Bruce was a positive, easygoing guy. But he had that confidence."

(In 1988, Jenner said, in an interview with CNN, that he had experimented with banned substances for a brief period during his career but quickly stopped. Today, Caitlyn says, "I don't remember saying that, but I never did anything. I never had a problem getting bigger naturally. And I was scared to death that I would get caught." Feuerbach also says he never used PEDs and never saw them used by others.)

By the summer of 1975, Jenner was the best decathlete in the world. After no-heighting in the pole vault (which results in zero points and certain defeat) at the national championships, he broke '72 Olympic gold medalist Nikolay Avilov's world record in August in Eugene and won the Pan Am Games in Mexico City in October. He was metronomically efficient in the field events, and his speed was improving. And there was always the 1,500—many decathletes coast though the race, but Jenner, all thick-legged and barrel-chested, hammered it, every time. "He was a great distance runner for his size," says Zarnowski. "If it was even close after nine events, he knew he would kick everybody's ass in the 1,500, and they knew it too."

Kenny Moore, an Olympic marathoner in 1968 and '72 and for many years afterward a writer for SI, recalls running 300-meter intervals with Jenner on the Stanford golf course, a pencil-thin distance runner and rugged decathlete, matching strides in 45-second repeats.

Jenner took pride in never collapsing to the track at the finish of the 1,500, as many decathletes do, often theatrically. After breaking his world record at the world championships last summer in Beijing, Eaton crumpled at the finish of the final event. Jenner called him, first to congratulate him, then to chide him: "Americans," Jenner said, "don't fall down in the decathlon."

There was a sense among his peers that Jenner was on the verge of that rare quality: bankable Olympic stardom. With the assistance of San Jose Community College coach Bert Bonanno, he had formed his own "track club," called the San Jose Stars, of which he was the only member. This allowed Jenner to accept a whopping $6,000 from Adidas, by having the money funneled through Bonnano and the "club" without compromising his amateur status. "There would have only been a few people getting more than that, if any," says Dwight Stones, an Olympian in 1972, '76 and '84 and another of Jenner's friends. "You weren't supposed to be making a damn thing." In the spring of the Olympic year Jenner took a call from Hollywood agent George Wallach but says she did not sign a deal, which would have made Jenner ineligible for the Games. They kept in touch.

The decathlon in Montreal was almost anticlimactic. Three of Jenner's best events—the pole vault, javelin and the 1,500—came at the end. He struggled briefly in the high jump, but Stones yelled to him from the stands, "Arms!" to get Jenner to engage his upper body more; he then cleared a personal best of 6' 8". When Jenner ran a PB of 47.51 in the 400 at the close of the first day—"Bruce always went all out in the 400 and died," says Samara. "In the Olympics he didn't die"—he trailed leader Guido Kratschmer of West Germany by 35 points and Avilov

HEINZ KLUETMEIER (SAN JOSÉ); NEIL LEIFER (GRACELAND)

by 17. In essence the competition was over. After Jenner cleared his opening height in the pole vault, the eighth event, another decathlete approached him and said, "So Bruce, now you are a millionaire."

Jenner could have jogged the 1,500 and won; he needed to run only 4:35 to break the world record. Zarnowski ran to the railing to tell him this, and Jenner said, "I know what I need." He ran a personal best of 4:12.6, the equivalent of a 4:30 mile, his last 400 meters in 60 seconds flat. No previous Olympic champion had run the 1,500 faster than 4:22; none have since eclipsed 4:27.21. "I didn't spend the last six years of my life training to run slow," says Jenner now. He crossed the finish line, and a young man jumped from the stands and handed Jenner a small flag. (Caitlyn still has it, along with the uniform.) Chrystie climbed down from the stands in a yellow shirt that read, GO JENNER GO. They hugged. Jenner sensed himself holding not just his wife but also the moment. "This is going to be over," Caitlyn recalls thinking, "and I've got a long life ahead."

At a party that night Jenner was introduced to an ABC executive, whom Jenner then introduced to Wallach. Now he had an agent. Looking back, Jenner says she had no real plans for the future. A few days before the decathlon, Jenner told SI's Frank Deford, "I'm scared to say anything. Everybody is ready to be reminded of Spitz [who failed to cash in big on seven gold medals in 1972]. If I mention one thing about what I'm considering, everybody'll say, 'Hey, the kid's just in it for the money.' " So Jenner was considering something—but not track and field. (He would never compete in another decathlon.) "No more mountains to climb," says Caitlyn today. Also, no money on the table.

Jenner has told the story many times: Awakening in a Montreal hotel on the morning after winning the decathlon, he stood naked in front of a mirror, with the gold medal around his neck. Caitlyn tells it again today, and like so much of what was described through the years, it plays very differently in 2016: "I said out loud, 'What the hell am I going to do now?' "

2016 ON A CLOUDLESS WINTER DAY CAITLYN JENNER falls into the corner of the beige couch in the sunken living room of the $3.6 million home she bought in early 2015, after her third divorce. It is a flat, concrete house on the top of a bluff, a single floor with a garage underneath. There are no other houses nearby and few higher in Malibu; when Jenner's transition was a tabloid-fueled rumor, paparazzi hunkered down in the distance and focused on the swimming pool with telephoto lenses. Through a window behind the couch, far beyond the brown hills and winding roadways, you can see the shimmering blue of the Pacific.

Jenner makes a track and field joke for me, the visiting sportswriter. "*Glamour* magazine Woman of the Year and Olympian decathlon gold medalist," she says. "This has got to be the greatest double of all time, right? It will never be matched." (A double is when an athlete wins two events in the same meet.) The former world's greatest athlete is wearing skinny jeans and a loose ivory sweater and wedge sandals.

PUBLIC PERSONA

Whether with the Kardashian clan or as a broadcaster, actor or reality-TV star, Jenner has been in front of the camera for much of her adult life.

She has diamond stud earrings, her nails are painted pink, and her hair falls loosely to her clavicle. When she moves, she moves with the subtle grace of an athlete. Male or female—doesn't matter. Athletic grace is athletic grace.

There are two kinds of history: There is what happened and what we interpret through the prism of time. There has been no prism quite like Jenner's. Forty years ago this July, Bruce Jenner stood in front of that mirror in that Montreal hotel, and this is what he really thought even then: "It disgusted me. I was big and thick and masculine. The rest of the world thought it was this Greek god kind of body. I hated it. But it's what I was given, so I just tried to do the best I could with it."

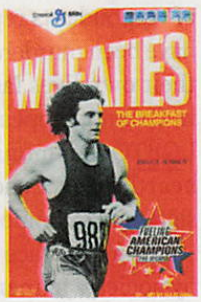
The story of the decathlon gold medalist is different now, shaped by Jenner's transition. It is a more important story, and also far more complex. Millions of Americans have memories of Montreal, of the ABC telecast and of the SI cover, of all those episodes of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*. That guy is this woman. It is an adjustment. "I get that," says Jenner. "And I apologize for that part of it. It was my secret and my struggle. I understand that a lot of this is hard to

JASON LAVERIS/GETTY IMAGES (KARDASHIANS); LONG PHOTOGRAPHY (ABC)

grasp." This was a half-century in the making. Jenner told *Vanity Fair* that he first began wearing his mother's and sister's clothing at age 10. Jenner began taking hormones in the mid-1980s, while living alone, twice divorced. "I was thinking that I would transition before age 40 [that would have been 1989]," says Jenner. "And I was really struggling with it. But the best way I can put it is, it just wasn't time. It wasn't time in my life, and it wasn't time in society. The issue was totally misunderstood. The only person I had heard of was Renée Richards [the former Richard Raskind who transitioned in 1975 and played professional tennis for several years afterward]." More than two decades later—separated from Kardashian and living alone again in Malibu, his two youngest daughters in their late teens—Jenner made a decision in the fall of 2014 to finally transition. "Then it was time," says Jenner. "I wasn't going to continue to lie to myself."

In one of our three interviews she leaned forward on the couch, held her right hand about four feet off the floor and said, "Little Caitlyn has been in there since I was this big. Sometimes she raised her cute little head more than others. I was female inside, but I wasn't an effeminate male. So I could hide easily in the male world. My life was distraction after distraction after distraction. Being a macho male was a way for me to try to convince myself that the woman living inside of me really isn't living inside me." Here Jenner makes a sweeping motion over the whole of her female self. "Obviously," she says, "it didn't work."

"I could hide easily in the male world. My life was distraction after distraction **AFTER DISTRACTION."**



There is, however, an implication that Jenner's decathlon training from 1970 to '76 suppressed his gender issues. This is not true. "They were always there," says Jenner. "You just don't deal with them. I put my energy into beating the event."

Samara remembers that around the time of his pole vault failure at the '75 national championships, Jenner lacked his usual intensity. "It was very unusual for Bruce," says Samara. "At the time he and Chrystie were getting into a lot of fights. We could hear them." Jenner says that before and for several years after Montreal, Chrystie was the only person who knew of his gender issues. Is that what they were arguing about? "Chrystie and I were O.K. at that time," says Jenner. "Even with her, I held back on how powerful this gender thing was. We fought because I was feeling the pressure to win the Games. I really *had* to win."

AL MICHAELS TELLS THE story of working with Jenner, post-Olympics, at a motorcycle race in Terre Haute, Ind., for a broadcast on ABC's Wide World of Sports. Afterward, on a short flight, Michaels recalls that Jenner, then 27, asked Michaels if he had ever considered having plastic surgery. "I'm thinking, I'm 32, why would I do that?" says Michaels. "Bruce says, 'If you do it when you're young, nobody notices.' " Caitlyn laughs at hearing the story today. "I was always considering plastic surgery," she says. "When you're gender dysphoric, you're constantly looking at yourself and seeing things that don't look right."

The day after the finish of the decathlon in 1976, Wilkins recalls standing on the balcony outside the housing complex that a group of U.S. Olympians shared in Montreal. Jenner was with him, and they looked out over a field where dozens of athletes from around the world were throwing Frisbees. The U.S. men's track and field team had won only four individual gold medals, but one was by Wilkins and one by Jenner. Their work in San Jose had paid off. "I looked over at Bruce, and I said, 'Well, what did you expect?' " says Wilkins. "He just nodded his head and said, 'Exactly this.' " Wilkins heard satisfaction in those words.

It is common for transgender people to disavow their pretransition lives, which were often painful. Caitlyn disavows neither Bruce nor his accomplishments. "I loved Bruce," she says. "I still love him today. I like what he did and the way he set an example for hard work and dedication. I'm proud of that part of my life. But this woman was living inside me, all my life, and it reached the point where I had to let her live and put Bruce inside. And I am happier, these last 12 months, than I've ever been in my life."

Those who knew Bruce Jenner well are left to take this fresh information and recalibrate their memories. Jenner told none of her old track buddies in the spring of 2015 that she was planning

GENERAL MILLS

to transition. Dan O'Brien spent many hours with Jenner in the 1990s and says, "Every time you saw Bruce, he would look a little different. This is all pretty shocking to me, but those different looks make some sense now." All the former athletes found out by watching Diane Sawyer or by reading stories a day later.

Some reached out to Jenner. Marra texted her, and a few days later she called him. They talked for three hours. A week later she called again, and they talked for two more. "The way I remember it, she'd like to have an impact," says Marra. "She referred to herself as *Jenner*, so maybe she was trying to make things comfortable for me." Samara has reached out but has not heard back.

All of them support her. "It's a little surprising," says Feuerbach, "but it doesn't change a thing about the way I feel about our friendship." Wilkins says, "He must have been in such horrible angst for a lot of his life. I can't even imagine it."

Stones recalls his own struggles with advancing age. "People passed me, and that felt like torture," says Stones. "Nobody ever passed Bruce. He finished it and walked away. But then he carried this burden around for so long. It must have been torture. And what Caitlyn is doing now? Awesome."

Eaton met Jenner at the 2012 trials, in Eugene. "Bruce told me how the Olympics were different, with a different kind of pressure, but just keep doing what I know how to do," says Eaton. "He's one of those guys in the sport you respect. The transition, that took a lot of courage. I admire her for that. She seems happy now."

Soloway, meanwhile, summons up a different image from Montreal, marinated over time, adjusted for recent events. "When she was Bruce, she was pretty," she says. "A lot of female athletes at that time were very, very butch. Bruce was beautiful and graceful."

Jenner's announcement last spring made her the most well-known transgender person in America, and possibly in history. (She is certainly on a very short list that would include Christine Jorgensen, whose transition in the 1950s was a national story; Richards; and *Orange Is the New Black* actress Laverne Cox.) Given her Olympic history, her celebrity and the tabloid rumors, it's unlikely she could have transitioned privately, but she chose to do so very publicly, she says, with a goal. "Maybe I could make a difference," she says. "This issue doesn't deserve to be in the gutter anymore."

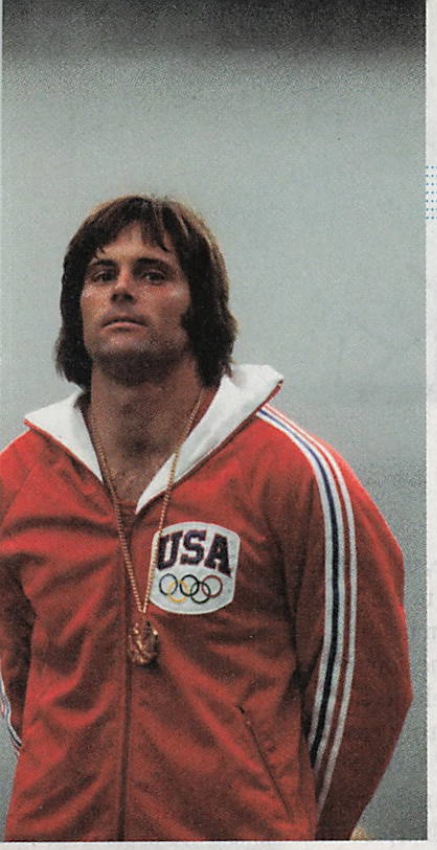
"I was thinking I would transition before 40. But it just wasn't time. It wasn't time in my life and **IT WASN'T TIME IN SOCIETY."**

Jenner has been criticized for being insensitive to the difficult lives of many trans people, because her wealth and fame insulate her from many of their concerns. But she did transition in view of the entire world, and has remained there. "That takes an extraordinary amount of bravery," says Olson-Kennedy.

Transgender society remains on the margins of acceptance. The estimate of 700,000 trans Americans is presumed to be low because many trans people are reluctant to come forward. A 2011 study by the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force found that trans people are four times more likely than the general population to live in poverty. A stunning 41% of respondents reported attempting suicide. Thirteen trans people have been murdered in '16, and at least 11 transgender teenagers took their own lives last year. The June 12 shootings at a gay nightclub in Orlando appear to have been an act of intolerance against the LGBTQ community; Jenner posted a tweet that day: "Shocked & heartbroken. Sending all my thoughts & prayers to my brothers & sisters in Orlando. Be safe the rest of this weekend friends #pride."

It is a populace often in crisis, evolving, and not well understood by society. Jenner has tremendous power but little experience as a trans advocate, or even as a transgender person. Says Jenner, "I'm only a spokesperson for myself and my own story." But her show includes several trans women with vastly more experience. In a sense Jenner does advocacy simply by playing herself. During February's Fashion Week in New York City, Kris Kardashian touched off a small tabloid frenzy when she said that Caitlyn was the worst-dressed of their clan. Soloway found this remarkable. "People are talking about whether Kris or Caitlyn has the better dress, instead of, 'Hey, Kris's partner is transgender,' " she says. "So Caitlyn becomes just another Kardashian plot, instead of being transgender. That's a totally positive thing."

Last summer Jenner received the Arthur Ashe Courage Award at the ESPYs, a decision that NBC's Bob Costas called a "crass



NEIL LEIFER

FUTURE SHOCK

Montreal was Jenner's last decathlon. The next morning he asked, "What am I going to do now?"

exploitation play." Barbara Walters named Jenner her "Most Fascinating Person" of 2015, and *Glamour* named her its Woman of the Year—half of Jenner's "double." However, when Jenner told Buzzfeed that "the hardest part about being a woman is figuring out what to wear," actress Rose McGowan wrote a Facebook post in which she said, "Caitlyn Jenner, you do not understand what being a woman is about at all." After a speech last November in Chicago, Jenner was confronted by several protesters who called her "an insult to trans people." In an episode of *I Am Cait* that aired in mid-March, she said that Donald Trump "would be very good for women's issues," while also criticizing his "macho attitude." In the same show she said that she would "never, ever, ever vote for Hillary [Clinton]." Transgender advocacy groups have traditionally viewed conservatives as adversaries, but Jenner also said, "Just because I'm a woman now doesn't make me all of a sudden liberal."

She is a massive target, yet chooses not to hide. Anything Jenner posts on Twitter, where she has more than 3.9 million followers, is met with subhuman bile rising from the deep well of digital anonymity, along with a solid measure of Yas Queens! "She's trying," says triathlete Mosier. "People have bestowed this position on her, and she's trying to do her best." A shrill minority suggests that Caitlyn's gender change is a ploy to drum up interest in various Kardashian properties, cynicism so dark that it tests one's faith in the human spirit.

Her old Olympic world struggles with gender definitions. Female sprinter Dutee Chand of India, who is hyperandrogenic (she has a naturally higher level of testosterone than international track and field customarily allows), challenged a ruling that she had to either take hormone-suppressing drugs or undergo surgery to limit testosterone production to be allowed to compete against women. Last July the Court of Arbitration for Sport ruled in Chand's favor and held that testosterone level alone is not sufficient cause for denying women the opportunity to compete against women. (The ruling is provisional, track's governing body has two years to provide further science.) Chand's case has brought attention and controversy to hyperandrogenic middle distance runner Caster Semenya of South Africa, who is a favorite for Rio and is approaching record times run by Eastern European athletes in the steroid-soaked 1980s.

In January the IOC struck language from its bylaws requiring transgender athletes to have gender reassignment surgery before being allowed to compete. Each ruling moves athletics closer to a position where gender is a spectrum, rather than a one-or-the-other proposition. Jenner is acutely tuned to the information in this arena. During one interview she opened her laptop and pulled up several stories related to gender and sports and encouraged me to write about the topic. "When you see what's happening in this country on the bathroom controversy, politicians just don't understand or get it at all. When it comes to this subject, the Olympic movement is far ahead of the rest of the world. Good for them," she says. (Jenner does not discuss whether she has had, or plans to have, reassignment surgery. "It's nobody's business whether I want to do that to my body," she says).

Now she sits at the dining room table in her home. Over her left shoulder, the sun is falling toward the Pacific. The view is stunning. Jenner could tell Olympic stories all day; about going back to Montreal a decade ago and, for the first and only time, visiting the stadium. The track was gone and everything looked different. It was disorienting. There is a plaque outside with the names of the medalists, and that was nice to see.

Not long ago she hosted a group of her transgender friends for dinner. They all wanted to see her medal, and Jenner broke it out and everybody took pictures with it and with Caitlyn—show-and-tell all over again. In the late afternoon Jenner fell silent as two men stood nearby and talked about the NFL, the Broncos, and the Rams coming to Los Angeles. Finally she shook her head theatrically and then raised her chin as if insulted. "Oh, you guys and your football talk," said the decathlon gold medalist, and then Caitlyn Jenner laughed. At history. At convention. At herself.

A single word—*transition*—never seemed more appropriate. □

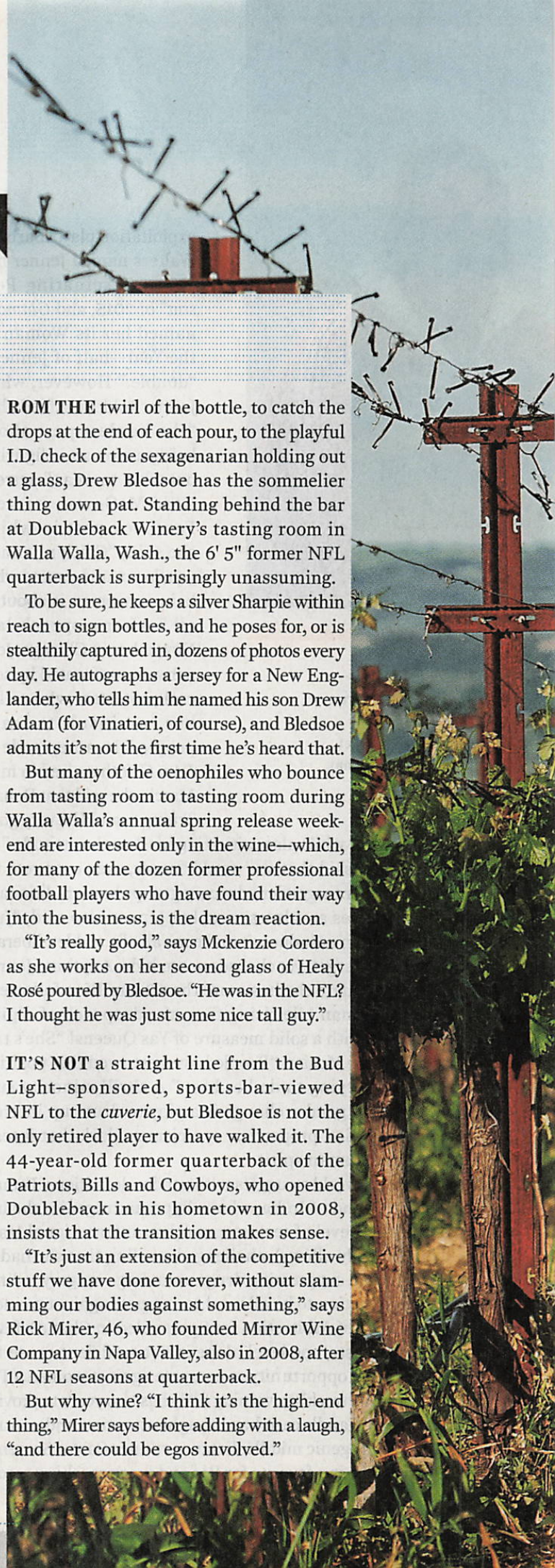
WATN

FROM THE

Retiring to a vineyard makes perfect sense to some former NFL players, who have traded in playbooks for fermentation guides and discovered second—more relaxing, though still demanding—lives among the grapes

By **STEPHANIE APSTEIN**

Photograph by
ROBERT BECK



FROM THE twirl of the bottle, to catch the drops at the end of each pour, to the playful I.D. check of the sexagenarian holding out a glass, Drew Bledsoe has the sommelier thing down pat. Standing behind the bar at Doubleback Winery's tasting room in Walla Walla, Wash., the 6' 5" former NFL quarterback is surprisingly unassuming.

To be sure, he keeps a silver Sharpie within reach to sign bottles, and he poses for, or is stealthily captured in, dozens of photos every day. He autographs a jersey for a New Englander, who tells him he named his son Drew Adam (for Vinatieri, of course), and Bledsoe admits it's not the first time he's heard that.

But many of the oenophiles who bounce from tasting room to tasting room during Walla Walla's annual spring release weekend are interested only in the wine—which, for many of the dozen former professional football players who have found their way into the business, is the dream reaction.

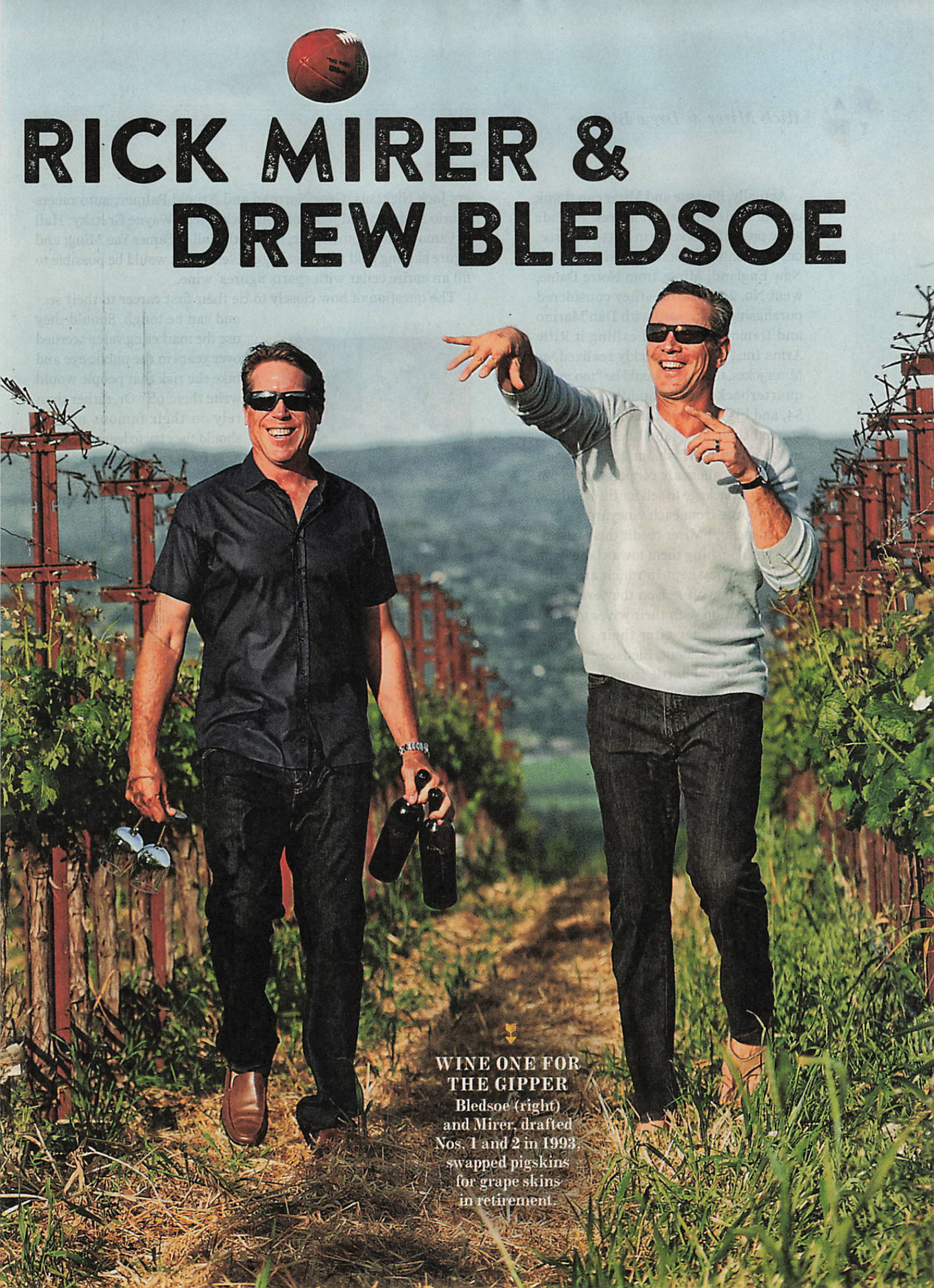
"It's really good," says Mckenzie Cordero as she works on her second glass of Healy Rosé poured by Bledsoe. "He was in the NFL? I thought he was just some nice tall guy."

IT'S NOT a straight line from the Bud Light–sponsored, sports-bar-viewed NFL to the *cuverie*, but Bledsoe is not the only retired player to have walked it. The 44-year-old former quarterback of the Patriots, Bills and Cowboys, who opened Doubleback in his hometown in 2008, insists that the transition makes sense.

"It's just an extension of the competitive stuff we have done forever, without slamming our bodies against something," says Rick Mirer, 46, who founded Mirror Wine Company in Napa Valley, also in 2008, after 12 NFL seasons at quarterback.

But why wine? "I think it's the high-end thing," Mirer says before adding with a laugh, "and there could be egos involved."

RICK MIRER & DREW BLEDSOE



WINE ONE FOR THE GIPPER
Bledsoe (right) and Mirer, drafted Nos. 1 and 2 in 1993, swapped pigskins for grape skins in retirement.

Actually, Bledsoe and Mirer can thank ego for their separate ventures. Friends since predraft workouts in 1993—Bledsoe, out of Washington State, would go No. 1 to New England; Mirer, from Notre Dame, went No. 2 to Seattle—they considered purchasing a vineyard with Dan Marino and Damon Huard and calling it Rifle Arms Inc., but they quickly realized, as Mirer jokes, that there would be "too many quarterbacks in the huddle." Marino, 54, and his Dolphins backup Huard, 42, started their own label, Passing Time, in Woodinville, Wash., in 2014. Now all four signal-callers are cooperating to put together a package to sell for the holidays, with a bottle from each vineyard.

Bledsoe and Mirer credit their friendship with pushing them toward the wine industry. They kept in touch after the draft, and one off-season they even took a joint vacation with their wives to Napa Valley. (At dinner after their recent SI photo shoot, Bledsoe opened the final bottle from a case of 1997 Saddleback Cabernet Sauvignon he bought on that trip.) "It's pretty easy to fall in love with that kind of scene," says Mirer. "Picnic lunch with world-class wines and a great view; I could get used to this real easy." But as their tastes matured, they started seeking out quality.

Soon they discovered another way to one-up each other: exchanging the most obscure wines they could find. Once they exhausted the Washington and California options, they branched out. Mirer stumped Bledsoe with a dozen old-vintage Ports. "How do you *find* this stuff?" Bledsoe asked. He got Mirer back with a case of late-'90s Brunello di Montalcino, from Italy.

After retirement they joined the crush of former athletes—a disproportionate number of them football players—who have gone from mispronouncing *Cabernet* to having a stake in a winery: Among others, there were the NFL's Dallas Clark, Mike Ditka, Alphonse Dotson, John Elway, Terry Hoage, John Madden, Joe Montana, Dick Vermeil and Charles Woodson; golfers Jack Nicklaus, Greg Norman and Arnold Palmer; auto racers Mario Andretti and Jeff Gordon; hockey icon Wayne Gretzky; Hall of Fame pitcher Tom Seaver; Naismith Hall of Famer Yao Ming; and figure skating gold medalist Peggy Fleming. It would be possible to fill an entire cellar with sports figures' wine.

The question of how closely to tie their first career to their second can be tough. Should they use the marketing value accrued over years in the public eye and take the risk that people would write them off? Or, rather than rely on their famous names, should they try to learn the business from the bottom up?

"The first time you drink it, it's because it's Mike Ditka's wine," says Ditka, who partnered with Terlato Wines in 2012, after a Hall of Fame career as a tight end and 14 years as a head coach. "The second time it's because it's good."

Huard and Marino took the opposite approach. Their names are not on the label; the only nod to their past lives—other than the wink of Passing Time—is in the eight stitches subtly incorporated into their logo. "It's not a vanity project," says Huard. "We like to think people who don't know football might ask, What are those markings?"

"Picnic lunch with world-class wines and a great view," Mirer says. **"I COULD GET USED TO THIS REAL EASY."**

Nearly all of the jock vintners use that phrase, *vanity project*, as in, "This is not a. . . ." Some experts disagree: "We can call it *winemaking*," says James Lapsley of the UC Davis Department of Viticulture and Enology, "but really, what most rich people do is hire other individuals to produce the wine and make the technical decisions. The owners are buying a lifestyle." Still, the industry welcomes their star power.

"It's such a great boost" when former athletes get involved, says Steve Burns, a former executive director of the Washington State Wine Commission who now runs a consulting firm. "I don't know that it's possible to measure it, but it brings a new audience to wine." Yao opened Yao's Family Wines, based in Napa, in 2011; the organization is now the biggest seller of high-end California wine by value in China, the fifth largest red-wine market in the world.

"In the early days I think people were skeptical of these guys' inten-

JOHN JACONO

VIN PALS
During their playing days, Mirer (above) and Bledsoe (opposite) would routinely send each other bottles of wine to taste.

tions, but we've seen so many success stories," says Burns. "If you're willing to do the whole thing, stand behind a table at a wine tasting, then let's go."

And many of them are willing. The depth of involvement by former athletes varies: Marino jokes that his title at Passing Time is "social director and drinker," but Bledsoe fusses over label designs, Mirer packs boxes during the holidays and Huard makes most deliveries in his 2004 Escalade. And they all express awe at Hoage.

HAVING GROWN UP in a family of teetotalers, Hoage had his first sip of alcohol when he arrived on campus at Georgia. Beer, of course. His tastes didn't change much during his first years as a safety in the NFL, with the Saints. His first date with his future wife, Jennifer, then a dining editor for *New Orleans Magazine*, was at a wine bar—but he ordered a beer.

Eventually she brought him around, and when they bought a property in Paso Robles, Calif., that included a 26-acre vineyard as a decorative element, a friend introduced them to Justin Smith, a wine industry star. Hoage, now 54, realized that the wine-growing lifestyle—working hard, spending time outdoors—appealed to him, and he asked Smith to make wine from his property. Hoage spent two years following Smith around, "cleaning stuff and asking a bunch of stupid questions," before setting off on his own in 2004.

The man who once described a wine as smelling just like the Paso Robles Big Brand Tire store now refers to himself as a *vigneron*, a French term for a winemaker who controls the entire process from seed to bottle. (For the record, Hoage was right, even if he didn't know it at the time; faults in winemaking can produce mercaptans, which give off a rubbery odor.) He bounces from TH Estate Wines' vineyard, where he might trim the vines or dispatch a pesky gopher, to the cellar, where he samples wine from one barrel and compares it with the contents of its neighbor. At his office, he examines root stalks and pores over irrigation-system designs. Other than one employee who helps him in the fields and three or four who work in the tasting room, the 2,500-case-a-year operation is an all-Hoage affair. Jennifer manages sales and the tasting room there.

But the more Terry works at his craft, the more he realizes how much there is to learn. Having majored in genetics at Georgia, where he had a 3.85 GPA, he thought he would be prepared for his new career. He pulled out his old textbooks—*Fundamentals of Biochemistry*, *Microbiology*—and lined them up on bookshelves in the winery's office . . . where they remain, collecting dust. "There's science," he explains, "but it's more like cooking than anything scientific."

For Mirer the education was part of the allure. Long before he considered going into the business, Mirer ignored the movie-watching and card-playing on team flights and instead delved into back issues of *Wine Spectator* and *Robert Parker's Wine Advocate*.

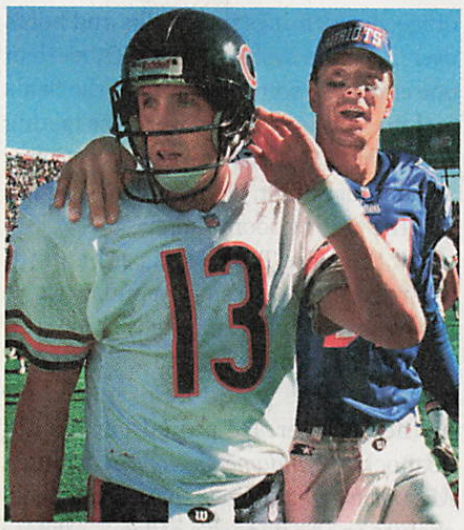
"What makes a Bordeaux a Bordeaux?" Mirer remembers learning. "Why is Pinot Noir such a finicky grape? Why do you chill

CRAIG JONES/GETTY IMAGES

white wines? There was so much depth to it, and it was so completely unrelated to football. I just couldn't get enough."

FOR DECADES athletes have attached themselves to ventures in the food industry—Joe Theismann's restaurants, Refrigerator Perry's Bar-Be-Que sauce, George Foreman's grills. As the American food-and-beverage culture explodes (in 2009 the U.S. became the largest worldwide consumer of wine), and as team nutritionists introduce their charges to fresh, seasonal food, a foray into viticulture is a natural next step. The prestige element is also key; this boom has not been mirrored in athlete-created beer.

"The NFL player today is a far more sophisticated person," Vermeil says. "He develops a **TASTE FOR QUALITY WINES."**



BOTTLE EPISODE
Mirer and Bledsoe met just twice as starters and split wins. This game, in 1997, went to Bledsoe and his Patriots.

Woodson, who owns Charles Woodson Wines in Napa, first became interested in wine as a young player trying to fit into a culture completely foreign to him. "It was a different take on drinking than I was used to," he says. "I didn't even like it that much, but I wanted to be a part of the whole thing."

"The NFL football player today is a far more sophisticated person," former coach Vermeil says. "He has more money, he goes to high-end restaurants, and he develops a taste for quality wines."

That was certainly the pathway for Bledsoe. As he became more interested in wine, he started hosting regular blind tastings for his Patriots teammates, and he noticed that Walla Walla Cabernets kept winning. *Maybe there is something real back in my little town*, he thought. (Doubleback is a reference to his return home.)

Now he drives to his 26-acre estate up the dirt roads on which he used to go brake sliding as a teenager in his Volkswagen Rabbit. Doubleback grows mostly Cabernet Sauvignon, along with some Merlot, Petit Verdot and Malbec, four of the six grapes allowed in Bordeaux reds. (Those grapes also thrive in Napa Valley, but because Walla Walla's *terroir*—climate, soil, topography—resembles that of Bordeaux, the Washington wines are more savory and nuanced than the fuller-bodied "California Cabs.") And the results are good. *Wine Spectator* rated Doubleback's first vintage, released in 2010, at 95 on a 100-point scale and listed it among the magazine's top 100 wines in the world that year. Under the guidance of Josh McDaniels, who last year took over for his mentor Chris Figgins, Bledsoe's childhood friend (and conveniently among the most respected vintners in Washington), Doubleback has shown no signs of slowing down.

Sitting on the edge of a stone fire pit overlooking his McQueen vineyard, Bledsoe is animated as he points to his other vineyard, 500 yards to the east. "The soil on that vineyard is totally different from this soil," he says eagerly. "This is wind-blown loess, so the soil up here actually was truly blown out of the valley and into the desert, like a sand dune, probably 10,000 to 15,000 years ago, not very long in geologic time, but then the soil over there is glacial flood deposit silt loam . . . . " He catches himself. "Sorry," he says, "wine dork." And then he rushes headlong into a brief geological history of the Pacific Northwest from the last ice age until now.

Later he heads over to that glacial flood deposit silt loam vineyard, where he becomes nearly giddy describing how Doubleback cleared out the Tempranillo vines last year, replacing it with a more marketable grape by cutting down the vines and splicing a Cabernet clone into the existing roots. "And because of its established root structure, it pushes so much energy into that vine that a year later that brand-new vine will produce fruit!" he finishes brightly. "Isn't that cool?"

In that moment Drew Bledsoe is almost unrecognizable as the man who was the youngest quarterback to make the Pro Bowl, who led the 1996 Patriots to the Super Bowl, who helped lay the foundation for a New England dynasty. Standing between two rows of vines, pulling at the leaf canopy to get a look at how the grapes are coming in, expounding on viticulture, he just looks like some nice tall winemaker. □

JIM DAVIS/THE BOSTON GLOBE/GETTY IMAGES

How to cut your cell phone bill in half.††

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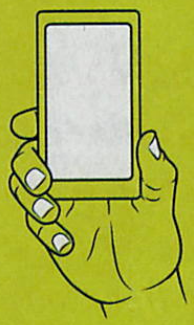

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Keep your 4G LTE† network and number.

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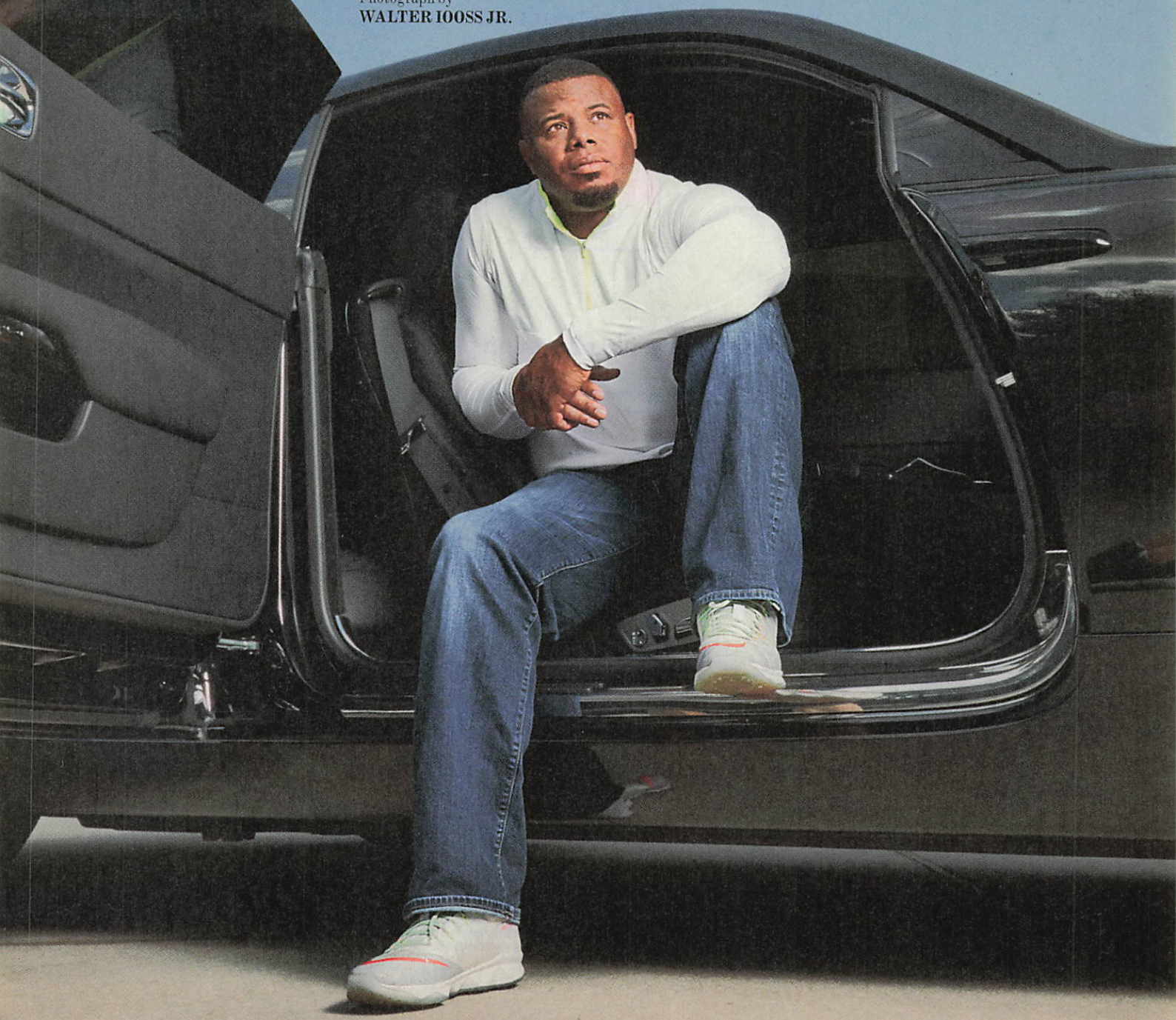
Only at Walmart

KEN GRIFFEY

How could one of baseball's biggest stars just . . . disappear? Junior always said he'd go quietly, but his hoopla-free retirement meant a modern giant of the game never got a proper send-off. Now, as he prepares to enter Cooperstown, it's time

By **BEN REITER**

Photograph by
WALTER IOOSS JR.



JR.

FEEL THE WRAITH

Griffey's retirement is guided by two pole stars: what his family needs from him, and what he feels like doing. The latter involves tending to a car collection that includes this Rolls-Royce.

ON MAY 31, 2010, Twins closer Jon Rauch threw a 91-mph fastball to the lefthanded pinch hitter the Mariners had brought on to try to erase a one-run deficit in the bottom of the ninth. The batter's swing still had the qualities that made it the most famous, and most beautiful, since Ted Williams's: the easy torque; the perfect arc; the low, one-handed follow-through. The ball, though, bounced meekly to the second baseman. Nobody knew it right away, but they would never see Ken Griffey Jr. swing again.

Griffey had always promised that he would go quietly. He used to tell people that he would announce his retirement with a fax on which he had scrawled two words: HE GONE. There would be no valedictory tour for him, no final season of paeans and gold watches. "There's certain people who like the fanfare and the waving goodbye, getting the rocking chair and the cowboy boots," he says. "Not me."

He didn't play the next day, which was no longer unusual. At 40 he was batting .184, and he still had the same number of career home runs with which he had finished 2009, 630, at the time the fifth most ever. After that night's game he hugged one teammate, backup catcher Rob Johnson, and packed up his place. At 5 a.m. he got into his Infiniti QX56 and pointed it southeast.

Jay Buhner, the brawny outfielder, had become Griffey's unlikely best friend—his "bald-headed brother from another mother," as Griffey called him—during their 11 years together in Seattle. Buhner had retired nine years earlier. Late that afternoon he received a curious call from another friend.

"Dude, I'm here at a gas station on Interstate 90 in Montana, and I swear to God that Ken Griffey Jr. is filling up right next to me," the friend said.

"Nah," Buhner said. "He's in uniform right now."

"I swear—it's him."

Buhner called Griffey. "Dude," Buhner said, "where the f--- are you?" Griffey told him. Griffey wasn't angry or distraught, but he couldn't stomach the idea that his mere presence on the team with which he

had spent his first and best years, and to which he had returned after a decade away, might force it to give him distracting at bats. Not when his three children—especially 16-year-old Trey, who was approaching manhood—needed him home.

Griffey drove for 43 hours, consuming only two Mountain Dews. He spoke with the people who meant the most to him. His mother, Birdie. His younger brother, Craig. His friend Torii Hunter. He spoke with his dad, Ken Sr., three times; Griffey long ago assigned him a special ring tone, of a heavily aspirating Darth Vader revealing, "I am your father." Other than that, he covered those 3,000 miles, across I-90 before weaving through the heartland to I-75, in silence.

The trip allowed him to come to terms with what he had left behind: all those long home runs and gymnastic catches in centerfield; a legacy as the star who stayed clean, during an era in which so many of its others were revealed to be tainted; a less-proud legacy, as one of the greatest players never to play in a World Series. The Infiniti's walls insulated him from the shock that his abrupt departure had created among some fans. "It was almost like, 'He owed me something,' " he says. "No. I gave you everything I got. There's nothing left to give you out on that baseball field."

When Griffey finally stepped out of the car, in the early morning of June 3, in the driveway of the six-bedroom Orlando-area mansion inside of which his family slept, he was at peace. It was as if he had emerged from 43 hours in a decompression chamber.

On Sunday, July 24, Griffey will be inducted into baseball's Hall of Fame, after having been named on a record 99.3% of ballots, all but three of the 440 cast. He will have already lived, often uneasily, in fame's prism for nearly three decades. We feel as if we've known him since he was 19, when he came to us with astonishing gifts and a wide grin on a baseball card. As it turns out, the man who seemed the simplest and purest of stars was always the most complicated.

IT'S LATE in the morning one day in early March, nearly six years after he drove away from baseball and 4½ months before Cooperstown. Walter Iooss Jr., the Griffey of sports photographers, has arrived at his house to shoot his portrait. The two go way back. In 1997 they collaborated on a coffee-table book, *Junior: Griffey on Griffey*, and Griffey respects Iooss's art. In retirement he has pursued photography himself, with a collection of gear Iooss deems better than his.

Still, setting up the shot takes some persuasion on Iooss's part. Griffey, no longer as lithe as he once was, claims not to own a suit ("A what? A who?") before producing one, from a closet otherwise full of Nike golf shirts in every conceivable color. He says that he does not have a bat ("Why would I have one of those?") but finds one. He genuinely doesn't own a hat. "I got visors," he says. "I got more visors than the Old Ball Coach," referring to Steve Spurrier, the former headman at Florida and South Carolina.

Finally besuited, and with stick in hand, Griffey stands where Iooss has directed him, in the center of his house's grand entrance hall. He's perfectly positioned in front of a wall of windows, through which one can see his pool, with its exactingly engineered rock formations, and a grove of palm trees. Iooss's finger hovers above his shutter button. There is just one problem. Ken Griffey Jr. won't swing.

"A couple things I'm gonna be remembered for: the hat backwards and the swing," Griffey says.

"AND THE SMILE."

"A swing," he mutters. "Everybody wants a swing."

Every man's house is his domain, his refuge. Griffey zealously subscribes to that concept. A visitor who has been permitted through its remote-controlled front gates will encounter 250 pounds of square-headed dog, two adult Cane Corsos and a Rottweiler puppy. "One of my dogs, Flo? She don't like a whole lot of people," says Griffey. The property is bordered by a seven-foot wall on three sides, and on its fourth by a lake that is home to alligators that grow up to 12 feet. Griffey, who changes his cellphone number as many as five times a year, built the house a decade ago, but he doesn't know any of his neighbors. "What am I gonna do, borrow some sugar?" he asks.

Griffey keeps baseball hours, staying up watching reruns of crime shows on the Ion cable network until its schedule ends at 3 a.m. "Sometimes I'm like, Wow, *Criminal Minds* is *deep*," he says. His house has a 10-car garage, and he spends a lot of time with its customized occupants,

WALTER IOOSS JR. (OPPOSITE); PETER READ MILLER (ABOVE)

HOUSE OF PAEAN
Griffey's youthful, bubble-blowing joy for the game made him a public darling; now he stays out of the spotlight, with his Orlando spread as home base.

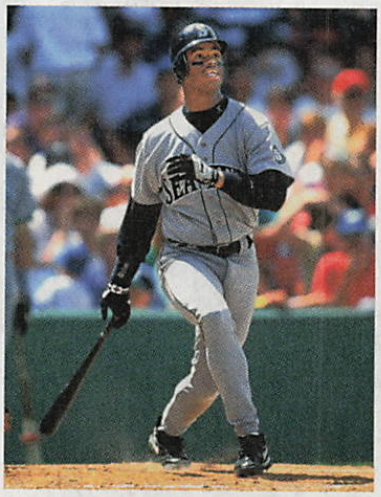
which would impress anyone who knows about cars and has gotten past the dogs. He's got a Range Rover, a Mercedes, a Ford F-150 Raptor truck, a chromed-out motorcycle and the same model of Porsche, he says without evident concern, as the one in which actor Paul Walker died. In the back of his driveway, too large for the garage, is a 45-foot Featherlite luxury coach that he has named the Rolling Projects.

He is particularly fond of his Rolls-Royce Wraith, which costs $304,350 at its most basic, which Griffey's isn't. It is the second Wraith he has owned. "I bought one, and Trey gave me a hard time about it because he saw on TV that they killed, like, 15 bulls to make the interior," he says. "I just got rid of the car 'cause I didn't want to hear about it. But I liked the car. So I bought another." He presses a button on the car's door frame. "Anyone need an umbrella?" he says, pulling one out of a secret compartment, his eyes shining with delight. The windows of each of Griffey's vehicles are tinted a glossy, impenetrable black.

Griffey is aware of his enduring image. To most, he's still the Kid, carefree and ever young. "A couple things I'm gonna be remembered for: the hat backwards and the swing," he says. "And the smile." Underneath it all, though, there was more going on than he wanted anyone to realize. He always had that sweet stroke, but for a long time he couldn't do anything with it when one man was watching.

He was three when Ken Sr. debuted with the Reds, in 1973, the first season of a 19-year career that would produce 2,143 hits and that he would end, remarkably, as his own son's teammate. Senior devoted his winters to his boys. "I was lefthanded, and he had no problems with lefthanded pitchers," he says of Junior. During the season, though, Senior was mostly gone. "Everyone thinks he was raised on the field," he says, "but the only kid on the field all the time was Pete Rose Jr. because he was the batboy. I was away from spring training, in February, until mid-October. I rarely got the opportunity to see him play."

As Junior developed into a phenom at Archbishop Moeller High, Senior's playing schedule meant he could attend only three or four games a year. Junior would crush the ball, except in those three or four games. "A hundred scouts in the stands, I'd be fine," he says. "When my dad was there, all I wanted was for him to see—hey, he got a hit. That was it. I couldn't do it. He'd ask my mom, 'Hey, is he that damn good? 'Cause he can't get a hit in front of me.' "



By 1987, when he was a 17-year-old high school senior, Junior was all but assured of being the draft's top pick. Senior had been traded to the Braves, and one afternoon before a road game in Cincinnati he accompanied Bobby Cox, then Atlanta's GM, to watch his son play. Junior whiffed during his first two at bats. Around 3 p.m., Senior had to leave for Riverfront Stadium. Later that night he returned home.

"How'd you do?" Senior asked.

"I did O.K.," Junior said.

"No, how did you *do*?"

"Well, I was 3 for 5, with two home runs."

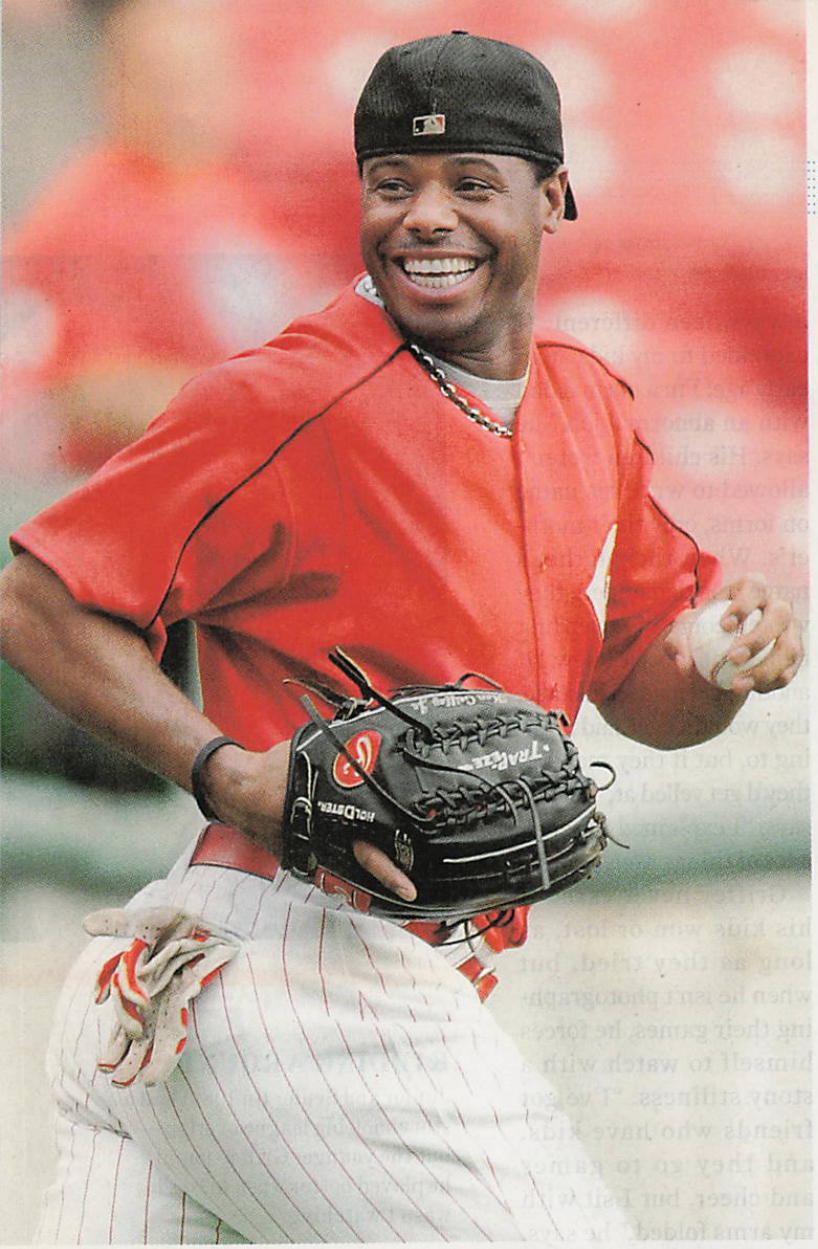
Junior didn't get his first hit in front of Senior until later that year, when his parents had driven their RV out to Arizona to watch him play for the Mariners in an instructional league. It was a hard single. "I said, 'You O.K. now?' " Senior says. " 'Yeah, I'm fine, Dad.' From then on he couldn't stop hitting."

If minor league pitching proved no match for him, the stresses of his new, high-profile life did. "All I want to do is be a normal kid," he'd tell his father. "Junior, you're not a normal kid," his father would say. One night not long after his 18th birthday, he swallowed 277 aspirin. "He didn't even tell us he was in the hospital," says Senior. "When we found out, I was so mad at him, I didn't even want to see him, after the doctor said that he was fine. It didn't make any sense. I think he was upset at the world because of who he was: Ken Griffey Jr., this

"Why does everybody want *me?" the young Griffey wondered as his fame mushroomed.*

"I JUST WANT TO PLAY BASEBALL."

CHUCK SOLOMON



JOHN BIEVER

JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENTS

Griffey could have been a lifelong Mariner, but he pushed for his 2000 trade to the Reds in order to be closer to his Orlando-based family.

big-time athlete. A lot of pressure on him. I told him, there's no pressure on you unless you put it on yourself."

Though Junior has discussed his suicide attempt at times in the past, he won't anymore. "We don't even talk about it," he says. "It happened. After it, I think my dad and I were able to talk a little closer."

Junior debuted for the Mariners 15 months later, and by then he had developed coping mechanisms to deal with the masses of people who were drawn to him. "For me it was, Why does everybody *want* me?" he says. "I just want to play baseball." He became known as the Natural, not only because of his skills but also because he claimed never to know the names of anyone he played against, even Cal Ripken Jr. That wasn't true.

"Think about it: My dad played against Cal," Griffey says. "Of course I knew who the guys were. You want the real answer? If I told you, 'Hey, yeah, I know this guy,' then what's your next question? It's, Where do you know him from, what do you think of him? If I say I don't know him? It's, O.K. Why would I want to talk about what I know and what I don't know at 19, 20? Like Michael Jackson and Rockwell sang, All I want to do is be left alone . . . in my twilight zone."

He met his wife, Melissa, during his rookie year in Seattle. She didn't know who he was at first, but quickly learned the best way to end an argument with him. Once, early on, he upset her in a shopping mall in Bellevue, Wash. "I'm with Ken Griffey Junior!" Melissa shouted. Every child in the mall came running after him. Melissa never did that again.

GRIFFEY DIDN'T begin to feel even small comfort with his fame until 1994, the year he turned 25. He had by then lent his voice to the beloved "Homer at the Bat" episode of *The Simpsons,* and he had signed his first big endorsement deal with Nike. In '94 he appeared in the movie *Little Big League* and released his own Super Nintendo game. The real change, though, came in January of that year. That was when Melissa gave birth to the couple's first son, Trey, and when life started to make sense to Junior, who announced he wanted to shed his youthful nickname. "I have a son, so I don't think it's proper for me anymore," he said. "*He's* the Kid now."

Their daughter, Taryn, was born the following October, but the Griffeys wouldn't make a third addition to their family for seven more years. Melissa had been adopted, and she always wanted to give to a child what her parents had given her. She never called her husband at the ballpark, but on one early May afternoon in 2002 she did. "There was a baby born today, here in Florida," she said. "I want this one." She brought him home, and she and Junior scrambled to come up with a name for him. They decided on Tevin. Griffey didn't meet his new son until a week later, when he flew home during an off day and signed the paperwork.

As it had for his father, Griffey's job kept him away from his family for most of the year, but he had access to two things that his dad didn't: modern technology and an enormous amount of money. As

Trey and Taryn gravitated to sports other than baseball—football and basketball, respectively—Griffey hired a videographer to record every one of their games, and he watched them in the clubhouse before his own. While many view the trade he helped engineer from Seattle to Cincinnati before the 2000 season as a mistake, and a neat demarcation of the beginning of his decline, he never regretted it. It allowed him to spend spring training at home in Florida, affording him an extra month and a half a year with his family. "I got to see them grow," he says. "They got to see *me*." Cincinnati's relative proximity to Orlando—and a private plane—also enabled him to attend his kids' games in person, even during the season.

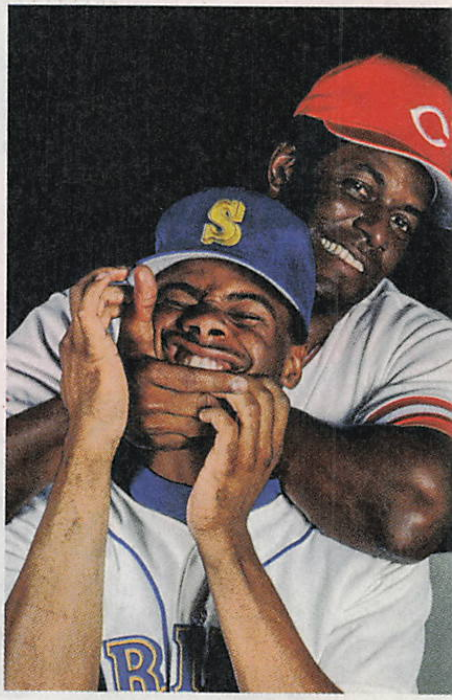
Trey is now a 6' 3" wide receiver at the University of Arizona, and Taryn is a point guard there. Griffey often shoots their games with the rest of the sideline shutterbugs. His love of photography is genuine, but it is also strategic, in that it allows him to watch his kids in peace. "Would you tap somebody on the shoulder if they're like *this*?" he says, as he pantomimes raising a camera to his eye.

Not long after he arrived home from Seattle, in 2010, he was on the road again, behind the wheel of the Rolling Projects, his 45-foot luxury coach, as Taryn's AAU season had begun. He drove it to Chicago; Sewanee, Tenn.; Atlanta; Augusta; back to Atlanta; and to New Orleans. The bus' name is ironic. He started calling it that after he registered the looks he'd receive when people, not recognizing him in his sunglasses and golf shirts, saw a black man stepping out of such a vehicle. They would ask him if the bus' owner would let them have a look inside. He was the owner, he said, and no, they couldn't.

Inside his home, Griffey authentically plays the role of the proudly beleaguered dad. "I'm probably one of the most expensive Ubers in the country," he says with pleasure. He has to protect his closets from his sons. "Tevin wears a size-11 shoe. I wear an 11. I come home, and he's wearing my brand-new Kobes. I'm like, Yo, that's mine!"

In the outside world, though, things have always been different. "I explained to my kids at an early age: I'm a normal dad with an abnormal job," he says. His children weren't allowed to write his name on forms, only their mother's. When their father's name was demanded, they wrote George, his given first name. Still, people knew. "If another kid made a mistake, they wouldn't get said nothing to, but if they made it, they'd get yelled at," Griffey says. "I explained to them, a lot of things aren't fair."

Griffey never cared if his kids won or lost, as long as they tried, but when he isn't photographing their games, he forces himself to watch with a stony stillness. "I've got friends who have kids, and they go to games and cheer, but I sit with my arms folded," he says. "I can't allow people to see me excited because they'll be like, Oh, there he goes, he only cheers for his kids. And if they think I'm a d---, who do they take it out on? My kids. They can't take it out on me. But they can take it out on them." When you've got fame like Griffey's, it trickles down through the generations, for better and for worse.



KIDDING AROUND
Junior and Senior (in 1989) had a storybook big league overlap—but the younger Griffey found he played better when his dad wasn't watching.

MARRIAGE CAN be a tricky institution for pro athletes, especially after the cheering stops and one sort of life become another. Griffey's parents divorced in 1999, eight years after his father retired. This October, though, Griffey and Melissa will celebrate their 24th wedding anniversary.

"Retirement's been way easier than I thought," says the ponytailed, placid Melissa, whose day seems unaffected by Iooss's photo session. "I thought it'd be a huge transition, because things aren't as glamorous when it's over. Meaning, things change if you allow them to. We haven't."

"Communication," Griffey says of their relationship's secret. "Knowing roles and boundaries. I'm more of the sports side. I'll talk to the coaches. She's more the administrator. After I'd been home two weeks, I looked at my wife and said, 'You did this all by yourself?' "

Stability and loyalty are important to Griffey. He has always employed the same agent, Cincinnati-based attorney Brian Goldberg, a friend of his father's who now represents both Griffeys. He's long had the same lawyer and accountant, and most of the same friends. At one point Iooss

RONALD C. MODRA

asks to borrow a landscaping cart, to move some of his gear around Griffey's property. "Just ask Dan," Griffey says. "Dan's my guy. Matter of fact, he was with me back in '96, when we were shooting the book."

Griffey's days, now, are guided by two principles. First he does what his family needs. The rest of the time he does only and exactly what he wants to do. That keeps him busy. "My friends always say, Damn, you don't let no grass grow beneath your feet," he says. He flies planes, as a licensed pilot and the owner of a Cirrus. He plays golf—a *lot* of golf. He had recently returned from a four-day, 121-hole trip to Bandon Dunes, in Oregon. He's yet to play Augusta, but not because of its exclusivity. "I can get there," he says. "I just ain't had a chance to go." He is cagey about his handicap. "I'm a 13," he says. "Am I a 13? No. But I want you to write that." Later, he admits, "I'm a three. But when you write this, it's gotta be a 13." The USGA indicates that he is a three.

Griffey happily plays the role of beleaguered father: "I explained to my kids at an early age: I'm a normal dad
WITH AN ABNORMAL JOB."

Other pursuits are less recreational. He has for many years served on the national board of the Boys & Girls Club, part of his long-standing commitment to children in need. "One thing about J.R.: He's got a huge heart," says Buhner. "I can't tell you how many times we'd be stretching before a game, and he'd have a Make-A-Wish kid with him. Every single day, at some points. That's a lot of work. He made those kids feel super special, but he never wanted everybody to know about it."

Now he flies around the country to appear with his father in support of prostate-cancer awareness, as part of the Men Who Speak Up campaign, which is sponsored by the pharmaceutical giant Bayer. Cancer has hit Griffey's family hard, and it is one part of his life that remains out of his control. Four of his father's uncles died of prostate cancer, and on consecutive days in July 2006, Griffey learned not only that his father had developed the family disease but also that his mother had been diagnosed with colon cancer.

Heartbroken and scared, Griffey batted .191 that month, but he expected little sympathy. "People think we're superheroes, invincible, supposed to not feel anything," he says. "People think we're not supposed to have problems. 'If I had his money, I wouldn't have a care in the world.' Well, people get sick, people die, and that's way more important than the sport." Both of Griffey's parents are currently cancer-free.

Griffey's house is filled with family photographs, but his collection of personal memorabilia is curated and confined to one room, his private study. Here he keeps such treasures as his 1997 AL MVP plaque, his Jackie Robinson autograph and a photo signed by the Predator. "Kevin Peter Hall!" he says, as if the thespian who portrayed the oversized extraterrestrial manhunter has a name as recognizable as his own.

The study also contains Griffey's 10 Gold Gloves. On the second of them, earned in 1991, his last name is spelled GRIFFY. Rawlings sent him a replacement, with the proper engraving, but he insists on displaying this one.

"He doesn't miss anything," says Buhner. "Trust me, he sees everything and he hears everything. He might not act like he's catching it, but he basically sponges everything in."

Any grudges Griffey holds do not extend to the three unidentified baseball writers who left him off their Hall of Fame ballots, preventing him from becoming the first unanimously elected inductee. "How I explain it is, other people need votes," he says. "*He's* gonna get in, so let me use my vote for this guy who's on the cusp. Being the highest vote getter of all time? That's a *wow* in itself." One player who Griffey hopes received some of the support that was diverted from him is Edgar Martinez, his teammate for all 11 seasons of his first stint in Seattle and a .312 batter who has not surpassed 43.4% in the voting—significantly short of the required 75%—presumably because he played primarily at designated hitter. "Edgar's one guy, and Harold Baines is another," he says. "Similar numbers, and Harold's not in either. It's not Edgar's or Harold's fault that they played DH. It's a position, and they excelled at it."

There is another group to whom Griffey also bears no ill will: steroid users. Griffey has long been treasured as an abstainer in an age of juicers, in part because it was hard to imagine the Kid doing something cynical like that, in part because he never looked as if he had and in part because he aged normally, meaning naturally and tragically. He hit 438 homers through age 30 but 192 thereafter, as he became a fixture on the disabled list. "You play any sport long enough, you're gonna get hurt," he says. "If you play like I did, ran into walls, didn't care about

human life sometimes, things happen."

They didn't happen to many of his contemporaries. Barry Bonds was for a time his doppelgänger, another son of a big leaguer who could do everything there was to do on a diamond. If there is one man whom Griffey might resent, it's Bonds, who chemically surged past Hank Aaron's home run record as Griffey's own pursuit was slowing. But Griffey feels as if Bonds should join him in Cooperstown. "Was he a Hall of Famer when he played in Pittsburgh?" he asks rhetorically.

Not only does Griffey maintain that he never used PEDs, he also says he never even thought about it. The closest he came was when he tried creatine, the legal muscle-building supplement, only to discontinue its use after two days because he didn't like its grainy texture. One reason was, to him anyway, performance-enhancing drugs were a more peripheral temptation than many believe. "People act like it was running through the locker room, like everybody knew what everybody was doing," he says. "I ain't know anybody doing it! You'd see people on other teams—Damn, he got big. That was about it."

The other reason? While he understands why many felt motivated to gain an unfair advantage, he never did. "I was already the highest-paid player in baseball when all this started," he says. "I'm already established. I've already been on covers of magazines. I've got my own video game, my own candy bar. Where am I gonna go from there?"

GRIFFEY LOVES to talk smack. His face brightens and his body language energizes whenever an opportunity to do so presents itself. When Iooss pulled up to the gate of the house outside Orlando, Griffey saw, on his video intercom, that the photographer was in the passenger's seat. "Walter's getting driven around?" he asked, excitedly. It was explained that the driver was probably a member of his small crew, but Griffey was having none of it. "He's getting driven around?" he asked again. "Wow, I'm gonna get on him for that."

He professes not to miss his athletic prime, the days when his body was elastic and capable of spectacular things. What he misses is the clubhouse. "The hardest part was leaving the day-in, day-out camaraderie with the guys," Griffey says. "The grind, you don't miss that at all. Jumping on planes, three days here, three days there. The trash-talking that goes on, that's what you miss."

He also misses the high jinks. "That's the last guy you wanna f--- with in the clubhouse, try to pull a prank on," says Buhner.

Griffey loved to make little bets with Lou Piniella, his manager in Seattle starting in 1993, such as whether he could hit a home run to right, center and left on three straight batting practice swings. The prize was always a steak dinner. During spring training of '95, Griffey was on a losing streak. One day he had an idea as to how he'd pay his mounting debt. "I got this guy, a farmer up the road," he told his teammates. "I need you to distract Lou." When Piniella finally returned to his office, he found that Griffey had delivered his steak dinners in their original form, that of a 1,200-pound cow. "Aw, s---, Junior!" Piniella shouted, due not as much to the animal's presence but to what it had done. "The damn thing had s--- all over," says Buhner.

"The hardest part was leaving the day-in, day-out camaraderie with the guys," Griffey says of retiring.

"TRASH-TALKING IS WHAT YOU MISS."

The year before, he'd pulled a subtler prank on another teammate: Alex Rodriguez, then an 18-year-old rookie shortstop who, like Griffey, had been the top pick in the draft. Griffey enlisted Seattle's trainer, Rick Griffin, to convince Rodriguez that the club's stars—including Buhner and Randy Johnson—were involved in a scheme to sell their sperm to the highest bidder, as if they were thoroughbred stallions, and that Rodriguez might himself attract an appreciable stud fee. He brought in a fake doctor. "Dude, you got great genes," Griffey told the rookie. The callow Rodriguez was skeptical at first. Then he started to come around. "How much money do you think we could make?" he asked. Griffey, mercifully, pulled the plug before donations were to be harvested. "Everybody has rookie hazing," he says. "That was his."

Griffey hasn't spoken to Rodriguez, whose career went on to mirror Bonds's more than his own, in several years. "Is he doing what he's supposed to be doing for his kids, being a dad?" Griffey asks. "From what I hear, he's doing that. That's the only thing you care about. I also understand, from the guys, that he's a much better teammate now than he was four or five years ago."

While Griffey enjoys the privacy to which retirement entitles him, and he can drop in on the Mariners whenever he wants—the club employs him as a special consultant—he still misses his teammates, like Buhner. Buhner, a Texan whose nickname is Bone, is in most ways Griffey's opposite: He prefers cowboy boots to sneakers and country music to hip-hop. Griffey would know that Buhner's wife was pregnant when he would bring a stack of hunting and fishing magazines into the clubhouse, to search for inspirations for names. This yielded sons called Chase—after a fishing lure—and Gunnar, for obvious reasons. It also led to a daughter christened Brielle Hagen, her middle name in honor of the Copenhagen brand of chewing tobacco. "Aw, s---, he told you that?" Buhner says. "He's such a f-----. I tell everyone it's after the Haggen grocery stores, so they don't think I'm some freaking redneck."

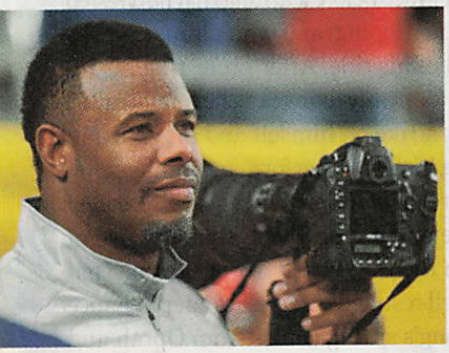


PHOTO FINISHER

Griffey indulges his photography jones by shooting his kids' games—and by curating a gear collection worthy of a professional shutterbug.

When the Mariners inducted Griffey into their Hall of Fame, in August 2013, he spoke of Buhner last. "There is no other person in this world, other than my parents, that if something ever happened to me or my wife, that I would want to raise my kids," Griffey said. Buhner dabbed his tears with his necktie and gave Griffey the finger.

When Griffey and Buhner played together, they would pause at either first or third base on their way to the outfield—whichever was closer to their dugout—and dap, touching gloves and performing a routine with their spikes. After his trade to Cincinnati, Griffey kept up the bit, at first with a phantom partner. A few weeks later Barry Larkin asked him what he was doing. From then on he did it with Larkin.

GRIFFEY HAS watched some of his former opponents, like Bonds and Mark McGwire, return to baseball as full-time hitting coaches. He has difficulty imagining that he'll follow them. He spends a lot of time traveling to Arizona to his older children's games, and Tevin, a star youth quarterback, is only 14. "Then I'll want to go to his college games," Griffey says. He could conceivably take a job in baseball after that, but that would be nine years from now, when he is 55. "But hopefully Trey gets to play on Sundays, and Tevin, too, and hopefully my daughter can play in the WNBA and overseas," he says. "If not, then watching them become responsible adults within the community is just as important." A return doesn't appear likely.

Ken Griffey Sr. has already proudly watched what his son has become. "Any parent wants their kids to do better than what they did," Senior says. "That wish came true. I wasn't sure how good he was until I played with him, in Seattle. I saw how much ground he could cover. All that speed. All that power."

This has been an unusual year for Griffey, as the Hall of Fame election again thrust him into the spotlight. He is thrilled to be entering the Hall, and promises an emotional speech that is part written and part improvised. But he won't be sorry when it is all over. "You're going to be introduced differently at sporting events and things because of it," he says. "Starting next year? You'll be back to doing what you want to do. For me, baseball was what I did. It's not who I am. I didn't do anything to make myself famous. I didn't invent anything. I didn't change the way baseball was played. I just played the game that I loved."

IT IS late afternoon now, and Griffey surveys his formidable house and the property on which it sits. "Yes, I have reaped the benefits of playing baseball," he says. "That is not a question." Out of the corner of his eye, he detects a wispy teenager, moving fast. It is Tevin, home from school. "Where you going?" Griffey calls out. "Going to lift weights," Tevin says, not breaking stride. Griffey isn't sure if this is a wise activity for an unsupervised adolescent. "You're doing what now?" he asks. "Oh, I'm going to have to go handle this."

A few hours earlier Walter Iooss Jr.'s stalemate with that day's subject had continued. It had seemed, for a while, as if Griffey's refusal to swing came from some deeply psychological place. Perhaps he feared that it wouldn't look the same. Perhaps the act would remind him painfully of past glories. It eventually emerged that the reason was nothing like that. "The whole thing is, my baseball swing messes up my golf swing," Griffey complained. "It'll take me literally three days to get it back. If I start hitting big old balloon slices, I'm blaming Walter Iooss. Walter came over, and now my s--- is raggedy."

Finally Griffey swung. It was half-speed, but it was beautiful. Iooss's shutter hungrily snapped. "One hell of a swing!" Iooss shouted. It always was. □

NORM HALL/GETTY IMAGES

WATN

Ten years ago he became Tour de France champion—and then, three days later, it all started to fall apart. This is the story of how one angry cyclist progressed from his Rage Against the Machine phase to a kinder, gentler John Lennon moment

FLOYD LANDIS

By **AUSTIN MURPHY**

Photograph by
CHRISTIAN HARTMAN/AP

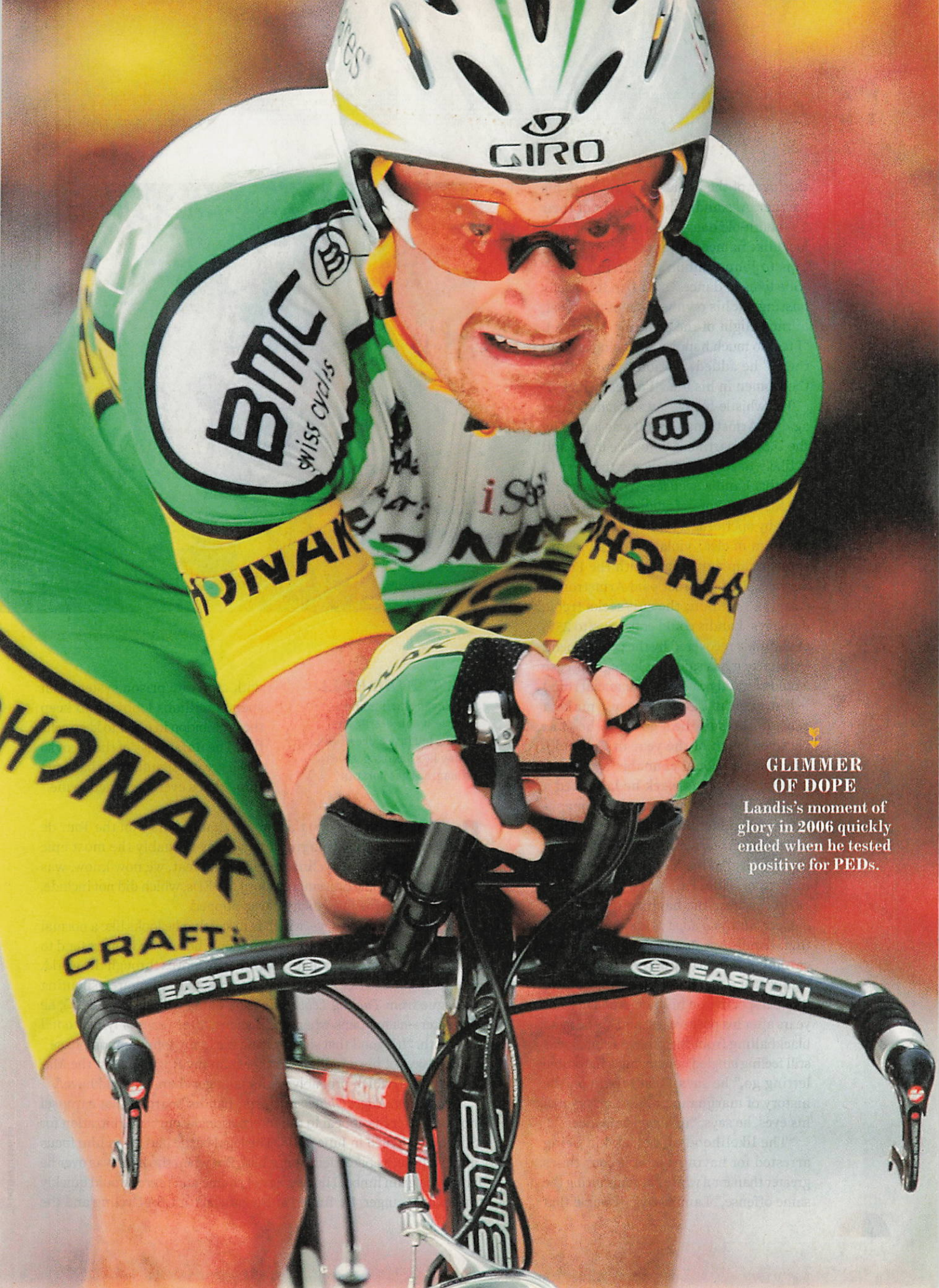
WHO ARE YOU, I considered asking the genial, smiling 40-year-old seated across from me, and what have you done with Floyd Landis?

You remember Landis, who had about 72 hours to celebrate his victory in the 2006 Tour de France before learning that he'd tested positive for doping, and who ultimately was stripped of his title. After protesting his innocence for nearly four years, he finally called in an air strike on himself and his sport. In detailing his use of performance-enhancing drugs for half of his pro career, he also pulled back the curtain on the systematic use of PEDs on the U.S. Postal Service team. That bombshell resulted three years later in Lance Armstrong's sitting across from Oprah and admitting that, come to think of it, he *had* doped his way to his own seven Tour victories.

Like Armstrong, Landis told the truth only after years of denials; he even wrote a book exonerating himself, the ironically titled *Positively False*. To defray his legal bills, he used money donated by credulous fans to the Floyd Fairness Fund. Yet, for such a seemingly unsympathetic character, he turns out to be surprisingly sympathetic.

I'd last laid eyes on him in the spring of 2010, when he sabotaged the Tour of California by popping up near the finish line of stage 7 in Los Angeles. Race organizers had denied his team entry; Landis's guerrilla press conference ensured that the next day's media accounts would be more about doping than about racing. The Landis of that time was bitter, troubled, *angry*—a far cry from the guy sharing a booth with me on a recent weekday afternoon at a tavern on Manhattan's Upper East Side. This Landis has been to rehab, been to counseling. He's much happier than the guy who took a flamethrower to bike racing's *omertà*.

New Floyd, Mellow Floyd, Floyd the Doting Father is a different cat, and not just because he fires up an occasional joint to soothe the chronic pain in his right hip. On a recent weekday evening he was greeted in



GLIMMER OF DOPE
Landis's moment of glory in 2006 quickly ended when he tested positive for PEDs.

the foyer of the home he shares with his partner, Alexandra, by the sight of their 23-month-old daughter, a Cindy Lou Who lookalike named Margaret, swiveling her hips to John Lennon's "Starting Over." "She likes to dance," said Landis, briefly busting out his own version of the twist, to the delight of the beaming Margaret. "I feel so much happier just being around them," he added, motioning to both of the women in his life. "I'm really lucky."

The whistle-blower lawsuit Landis filed against Armstrong in 2010 was joined by the U.S. Department of Justice in '13 and is likely to come to trial over the next 12 months. Landis accuses Armstrong and his associates of defrauding the government by operating a sophisticated doping program in clear violation of the team's sponsorship agreement with the Postal Service. That contract paid Armstrong's team $30 million; the suit seeks treble damages. Landis could collect up to 25% of all funds recovered by the government. (Armstrong has said that losing this case would certainly cause him financial ruin.)

But even if Landis doesn't make a cent on the suit, he's going to be O.K. He lives much of the year in Colorado, where recreational cannabis was legalized in 2012. This week he launched a new brand of marijuana and marijuana-infused products, Floyd's of Leadville, which should earn him a tidy profit, if not the approval of his Mennonite forebears in Farmersville, Pa.

He can hear the haters already: *Once a doper, always a doper.* He's prepared for that. Landis has done a deep dive on the cannabis industry and on the issue of legalization. Studying that subject gave him perspective on his own problems. For years after his positive test and his de facto blackballing from the pro peloton, "I was still feeling singled out, having a hard time letting go," he says. Reading up on the history of marijuana prohibition opened his eyes, he says, "to bigger injustices."

"The likelihood of a black kid being arrested for having a joint is four times greater than for a white kid committing the same offense," Landis says. "Couple that with a private prison system that spends millions lobbying to keep the prohibition in order to keep cells full. The unfairness of that is of so much greater significance than anything that's ever happened to me."

MICHAEL J. LEBRECHT II

SKETCHING HELL

Portrayed as a liar and a cheater by his detractors, Landis fell into a deep funk. Today he's asking people to reimagine that portrait.

IT WAS 10 years ago this month that Landis won the Tour de France on the strength of what was arguably the most epic one-day ride in cycling history. That feat, we now know, was made possible by a smorgasbord of PEDs, which did not include, he insists, the one for which he was popped.

He is heavier these days, which is to say that he looks like a normal guy rather than a member of a profession whose practitioners tend to be alarmingly gaunt. But in the way that he moves through the world, embracing Alex after a day apart, dancing with Margaret, spouting dialogue from *The Big Lebowski* ("The bums will always lose!"), he is lighter—as happens when one decides, after years of lying, to tell the truth. "It's good that she's getting me in my John Lennon phase," Landis says of his daughter, "rather than my Rage Against the Machine phase, which probably went on longer than it should have."

Depression. Rage. Oblivion. Repeat. Landis boarded that carousel not long after his appeal to the International Court of Arbitration for Sport was denied in June 2008. The legal battle had given him focus and purpose, as bike racing once had. But when the fight was over he entered a grim limbo. His feelings of shame and regret would quickly give way to anger. He fumed at the officials at USA Cycling and the

Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI), who he claims knew about doping in the sport but turned a blind eye to it. He was angry at the false friends who'd abandoned him and at the French lab technicians who'd detected in his urine sample traces of exogenous testosterone, a drug he contends he did not use during that Tour. Sure, he'd infused blood, injected erythropoietin (EPO) and human growth hormone (HGH). *But he'd beaten those tests fair and square!* That pissed him off, as did his knowledge—often firsthand—that many of his peers in the peloton were as dirty as he was, if not dirtier. When '06 Tour runner-up Óscar Pereiro was officially named the winner of that race—14 months after the fact—he complained that Landis had robbed him of the chance to stand atop the podium in Paris. Landis later pointed out Pereiro's hypocrisy: He recalled speaking with Pereiro about the Spaniard's doping regimen *during* the race. Pereiro, Landis said to *The Sunday Times* in '10, "told me that he had another blood transfusion to do" going into the final time trial. (Pereiro denies this.)

If you can't imagine downing 15 painkillers and a fifth of Jack in one day, then, says Landis, "you just haven't **F----- UP ENOUGH."**

"Those were dark days, man," Landis says. "I didn't know if I was going to make it. I was never really suicidal, but I couldn't face the world. I just wanted to forget."

To do that, he would retreat to a remote lair in Southern California's San Jacinto Mountains, a ramshackle abode with '60s-era wood paneling and a tan shag carpet. Every day he'd walk two miles to Mountain Top Liquor—"my home away from home," he says. "I'd buy some whiskey, say hi to the local meth heads, then walk back."

Having undergone a hip resurfacing in 2006, just two months after that disastrous Tour, Landis had prescriptions for Vicodin, Percocet and Norco. Some days he would down as many as 15 Norcos with a fifth of Jack. "I was addicted," he says. "I feel lucky to be here, man."

"But how do you put away that much whiskey in 10 hours?" asks a visitor. "That's almost inconceivable."

"You just haven't f----- up on a big enough scale yet," Landis says.

IN RETROSPECT, they should've seen it coming. Since his first year racing a road bike, Landis had demonstrated a proclivity for audacious, if doomed, attacks. In 1998, his second pro mountain biking team folded under him. Rather than waste his fitness, Landis signed up for road races as a privateer, attached to no team. He would attack from the first mile, not because he had a prayer of winning but because he took genuine pleasure in sowing chaos.

Signed by the U.S. Postal Service team in 2002, the young man from Pennsylvania Dutch country quickly established himself as a major talent—and a contrarian. Months before the '04 Tour de France, he and his fellow Postal Service riders reported to the offices of team doctor Luis García del Moral, in Valencia, Spain. Everyone was to have a liter of blood removed, to be reinfused during the Tour, when their red blood cell counts would be depleted. "So [del Moral] says, 'Everybody write a code name on your blood bag that you won't forget,' " Landis recalls.

Rolling his eyes, Landis wrote on his own bag, FLOYD. Reasonably, this angered the doctor.

"He said, 'What are you doing? You wrote your own name!' I said, 'Listen, man. My biggest concern here is getting the wrong blood. If [the authorities] have found this bag, I think we're all f-----, so I might as well save 'em the trouble.' "

Landis's contract was up following that season. After low-balling him for months, the USPS made a competitive offer at the 11th hour. *Thanks*, Landis replied, *but I'm already gone.* He signed instead with Phonak and blazed to victories in three major stage races early in the 2006 season. He started Stage 16 of that year's Tour de France in *le maillot jaune*—and finished it as an object of pity.

From the first of the day's four categorized climbs, a 43-kilometer grind up the Col du Galibier, Landis had known he was in trouble. He masked his misery until the base of the final ascent, La Toussuire, and then cratered spectacularly. "It was like, We've got a man down here," he recalls. "I just . . . *Could. Not. Go.*"

"He was destroyed mentally," recalls Axel Merckx, a Phonak teammate who paced the fallen leader to the summit. "He kept telling me, 'Just go! It doesn't matter anymore!' "

Landis plunged to 11th in the overall standings, 8:08 behind the new leader, Pereiro. In addition to drowning his sorrows that night with four shots of whiskey, Landis injected himself with a low dose of HGH to boost recovery. He also adminis-

tered 500 IUs of EPO to nudge up his count of new red blood cells, which had been suppressed three days earlier when he'd transfused the last of his three 330-milliliter blood bags. Thus fortified, he weighed his options. He could ride conservatively and settle for a place in the top 10. He could husband his strength for the time trial, three days hence, and at least win a stage.

Or he could throw a Hail Mary.

"I'm going to attack," he confided to Merckx, who nodded and smiled. But, Merckx says, "I was thinking, 'Yeah, right.' "

The next day, about five kilometers before the base of the first Alp (there would be five in all), Landis launched a vicious attack. In the beginning the heads of state marked him. Denis Menchov, Carlos Sastre and Andreas Klöden matched Landis's pace—until they decided it was ridiculous. Klöden, from T-Mobile's team, was the last to peel off. "Come with me," Landis urged him. "You can win the Tour!"

"You're crazy," the German replied. "It's too far. You're never gonna make it."

Landis's lead over the peloton grew inexorably, incredibly. Far behind, his rivals bickered about who should lead the chase. By the time they got organized, it was too late. Punching the air as he crossed the line in Morzine, Landis finished 7:08 ahead of Pereiro, whom he now trailed by only 30 seconds, a gap he would close easily in the time trial.

That Sunday he stood atop the podium on the Champs-Élysées. By Wednesday his world was crumbling.

FOR SOMEONE who got so much practice at it, Landis was a lousy liar. His heart didn't seem to be in it. Asked at his first press conference following the positive test in France if he'd ever used PEDs, he began his denial with, "I'll say no. . . ."

Yet somehow Landis was stunned by his swift passage from hero to punch line. It felt unfair that a press corps so willing to give Armstrong the benefit of the doubt had turned on him so quickly. More hurtful was the way Landis's former colleagues let him know, not in so many words, *You're dead to me.* When Landis's suspension ended before the 2009 season, he tried to find a ride with a Pro Tour team, but he was radioactive. Johan Bruyneel, his old boss at USPS, now with Astana, was honest. "He said, 'If we hire you, I don't think we'll be able to get into any races,' " Landis says. "But at least he took my call. Most teams wouldn't even do that."

In what amounted to a demotion to Double A ball, Landis joined a domestic team, OUCH-Maxxis, and looked at the bright side. He figured that at some of OUCH's larger races, like the tours of California and Missouri, he could reconnect with old friends in the peloton, do some networking and ride his way back into the big leagues.

Instead, he found he was a pariah. "People I'd raced next to for thousands of hours wouldn't talk to me," says Landis, still incredulous. One reason he had kept his mouth shut during his suspension, he says, was to protect riders whom he'd considered his friends. That risk had been removed.

The few companions he did have were worried about him. At the 2009 Tour of Missouri he had a heart-to-heart with former USPS teammate Dave Zabriskie, who recalls, "It was clear to me that [Floyd] was really hurting."

By 2010 Landis knew the way out. The time had come, he says, to "torch the whole thing."

Like Sy Sperling—not only the Hair Club For Men president, but also a client—Landis is proud to admit he

CONSUMES HIS OWN PRODUCT.

THE EMAIL to USA Cycling CEO Steve Johnson, dated April 30, 2010, got right to the point: . . . *I was instructed on how to use Testosterone patches by Johan Bruyneel during the [Critérium du Dauphiné Libéré] in June ['02], after which I flew on a helicopter with [Lance] Armstrong from the finish . . . to San Mauritz [sic], Switzerland, at which point I was personally handed a box of 2.5 mg patches. . . .*

Landis went on for another thousand words, naming names, detailing incidents. He fired off similar missives to sponsors and cycling officials and found it all immensely cathartic. "I would hit SEND on those emails and go, 'Oh, man, this is great; I can sleep soundly for the first time in four years. I've told my story. I feel better now."

Many people had the opposite reaction, including Armstrong, who denied all, attacking his accuser's credibility. The Texan had good reason to worry. Landis's allegations added fuel to an investigation led by FDA special agent Jeff Novitzky, the zealous gumshoe who'd spearheaded the BALCO investigation. Armed with subpoena power, Novitzky spoke with most of Armstrong's former teammates. Lo and

CHAMP ILLICITÉ

Landis's first-place finish on the famed Parisian boulevard made him a target. When he went down for PEDs and no one had his back, he helped tear apart the whole doping system.

behold, the men who'd suffered for Lance on the road were unwilling to perjure themselves for him. But after the Feds' case was inexplicably dropped in early 2012, USADA CEO Travis Tygart picked up where Novitzky had left off, deposing many of the same witnesses. The following October, USADA released the results of its investigation, a damning 164-page "reasoned decision" for stripping Armstrong of his Tour titles. He would lose eight sponsors in a single day.

But while Landis was in a better place, he still needed help. He was still angry, though less angry than before. And he was still abusing painkillers. He was stuck.

DAVID (TIGER) Williams is a well-known Wall Street trader, a former Yale hockey player and a strong amateur cyclist. At one point he had a small stake in Tailwind Sports, which owned Armstrong's Tour de France teams. In 2003 Williams was headed from the UCI World Championships in Ontario to the Interbike trade show in Las Vegas, and he had an open seat on his plane. He offered it to Landis, who'd never been on a private jet and who was especially taken with the minibar. "I've never seen anyone get so excited over a canister of Pringles," Williams recalls.

They became friends. When Landis paid Williams a visit in 2011, it was to discuss a possible "business model." This was during Floyd's short-lived Ricky Bobby phase, when he was toying with the idea of becoming a NASCAR driver. But during that visit Tiger and his wife, Caroline, sensed their friend might benefit, as Tiger puts it, "from a change of scenery. It was time for him to look at life through the lens of what he wanted to do *after* cycling."

He spent the next few months looking at life from the deck of Williams's Connecticut guest house. Landis moved there "still not really knowing who I was or where I was going," he says. "But at least I was around people who had some sort of mission in life." During those months he started to let go of his anger. And while he struggled to figure out what to do for a second act, he had better success figuring out with whom he wanted to spend it. In 2013 he went on his first date with Alex; they clicked immediately.

Two years ago, intrigued by the burgeoning cannabis industry, Landis moved to Colorado. After working six months for a compounding pharmacy—he was basically a sales rep, educating doctors on the benefits of cannabis-based pain and anxiety relievers—he began exploring the possibility of going into the business himself. Like Sy Sperling, who was not only the Hair Club For Men president but also a client, Landis is proud to admit that he is an occasional consumer of his Floyd's of Leadville products. By turning to cannabis to manage the chronic pain in his hip, which will soon require another surgery, he has less need for pills. But that's not the only reason he smokes. "There are different kinds of pain," he says. "Physical and emotional."

These days he's experiencing less of each. On a recent visit to New York City, Landis attempted to merge as he exited the Triborough Bridge toll plaza. Much time passed. With no one cutting him slack, he had no other choice, he felt, than to forcibly take a lane.

He had not figured on his newest nemesis, a steely-eyed woman in an Audi convertible who was determined to give no quarter. So resolute was she that, after a low-speed collision with Landis's car, she proceeded to tap the vehicle in front of her. That driver got out, glowered at her, then got back in his car.

Landis did not leave his vehicle, did not raise his voice. He felt less anger than . . . *wonderment*. "I had to respect her determination," he recalls. "I was like, You win!"

Congratulated on his newfound serenity, he says, "Well, I mean, you can't stay pissed off forever." □

FROM TOP: PETER DEJONG/AP; BRYN LENNON/GETTY IMAGES

The man who made MMA cool, who bled his way to pay-per-view fame? He wears a suit to his UFC job; his new cage is an office in Las Vegas. But that Mohawk is still going strong

CHUCK LIDDELL

As told to
L. JON WERTHEIM

Photographs by
KOHJIRO KINNO

THE ICEMAN COMETH. Relentlessly so. Way back in, say, 2005, the UFC was creeping into the mainstream, and its figurehead came adorned with a Mohawk. Chuck (the Iceman) Liddell fought the way he did everything else: aggressively and without much nuance. A light heavyweight, Liddell (21–8) won mostly by throwing haymakers—his 13 wins by knockout remain a UFC record—and refusing to tap out. And his toughness was leavened by a measured, likable disposition. He was a college graduate (an accounting major, no less!) capable of kicking serious ass in an unapologetically brutal sport.

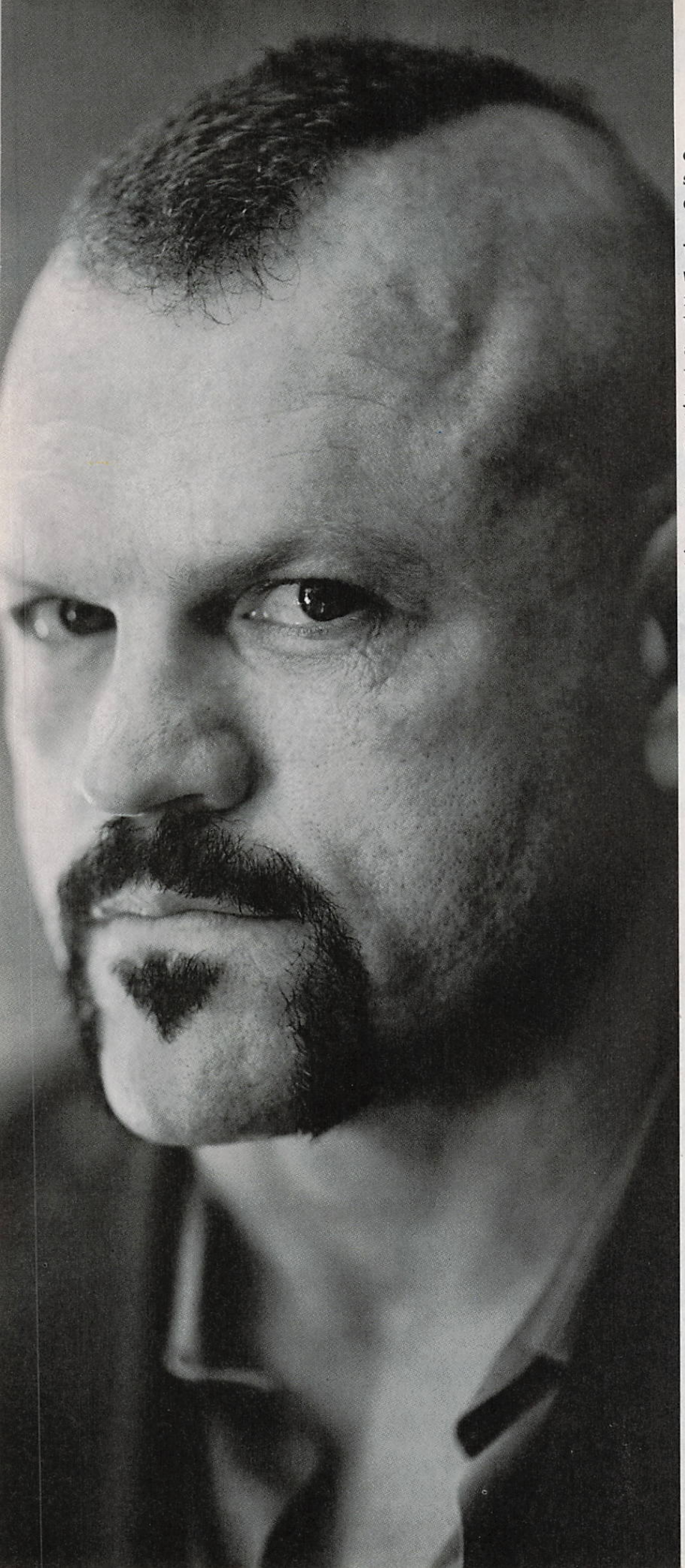
When Liddell's reflexes and speed ultimately slowed a bit, his full-bore style betrayed him. After losing five of his last six fights, he retired in 2010. But he hasn't gone far. He holds a vague executive position, VP of Business Development, with the UFC, a parting gift for the vital role he played in the outfit's growth. He trains fighters. When Jon Jones needed a fill-in foe for an April bout, Liddell's name even surfaced. Now 46, he spoke with SI this spring, shortly before heading to Buenos Aires to shoot a season of *The Ultimate Fighter*, a reality-TV series that might as well have been named in his honor.

If you're having a hard time hearing me, it's because I just got back from Coachella. I was there all weekend, so my voice is gone, yelling for three days. And, yeah, I was at the house with Johnny Manziel.

The UFC takes cares of me. I'm working for them, but I live in Calabasas [Calif.], working on some movie roles and having a good time. Yeah, life's pretty great.

Conor McGregor has a big mouth. But I do love the way he fights. I like Glover Teixeira; he's a former training partner. And I love—aw, I can't think of his name now. . . .

Totally different challenges, but being a dad and fighting both wear you out. I've got two sets of kids [with two women]: a 17-year-old and a 15-year-old; and a four-year-old and a two-year-old. Two sets is hard—two



different tracks. You try to be there for both sets, but it gets complex, keeping everything organized. It keeps life interesting, though.

The UFC—and MMA in general—have come a long way from where I started. And that's great. I mean, we were *begging* states to let us fight. We were begging for the media to take it seriously. Now that same newspaper we were begging for coverage is calling me just to ask where I'm going for vacation. But here's the thing: We had a great time. Growing the sport was fun.

It's a great sport; people just needed to see it. *The Ultimate Fighter*—that was like the Trojan horse. People saw that and figured out what fighting was all about.

There were no women fighting when I started. But they have great technique. I think that as the sport grows, they'll get better and better.

Oh, I'm still a huge fan of fights. I love watching fights, still get excited every time I go. I still love everything about fighting—training, preparing. . . . I even like cutting weight. It was never work. Yeah, it's hard to walk away.

People ask how often I use my accounting degree. Well, not much at all. I used to do the books when I had my own gym in San Luis Obispo [Calif.], but I don't have that anymore. Taxes and expenses—I have an accountant for all that. It's easier that way.

I'm walking around at 230 pounds now. That was my walk-around weight when I was fighting. I'm staying in shape, for sure.

The Mohawk? Yeah, I still got it. Hard to give up. My wife likes it, so it's not going anyway.

The best advice I ever got as a fighter is the same advice I like to give: Make sure you're in shape for a fight. The worst thing is losing because you got tired, because you didn't work hard enough in training. Ugh, that's the worst.

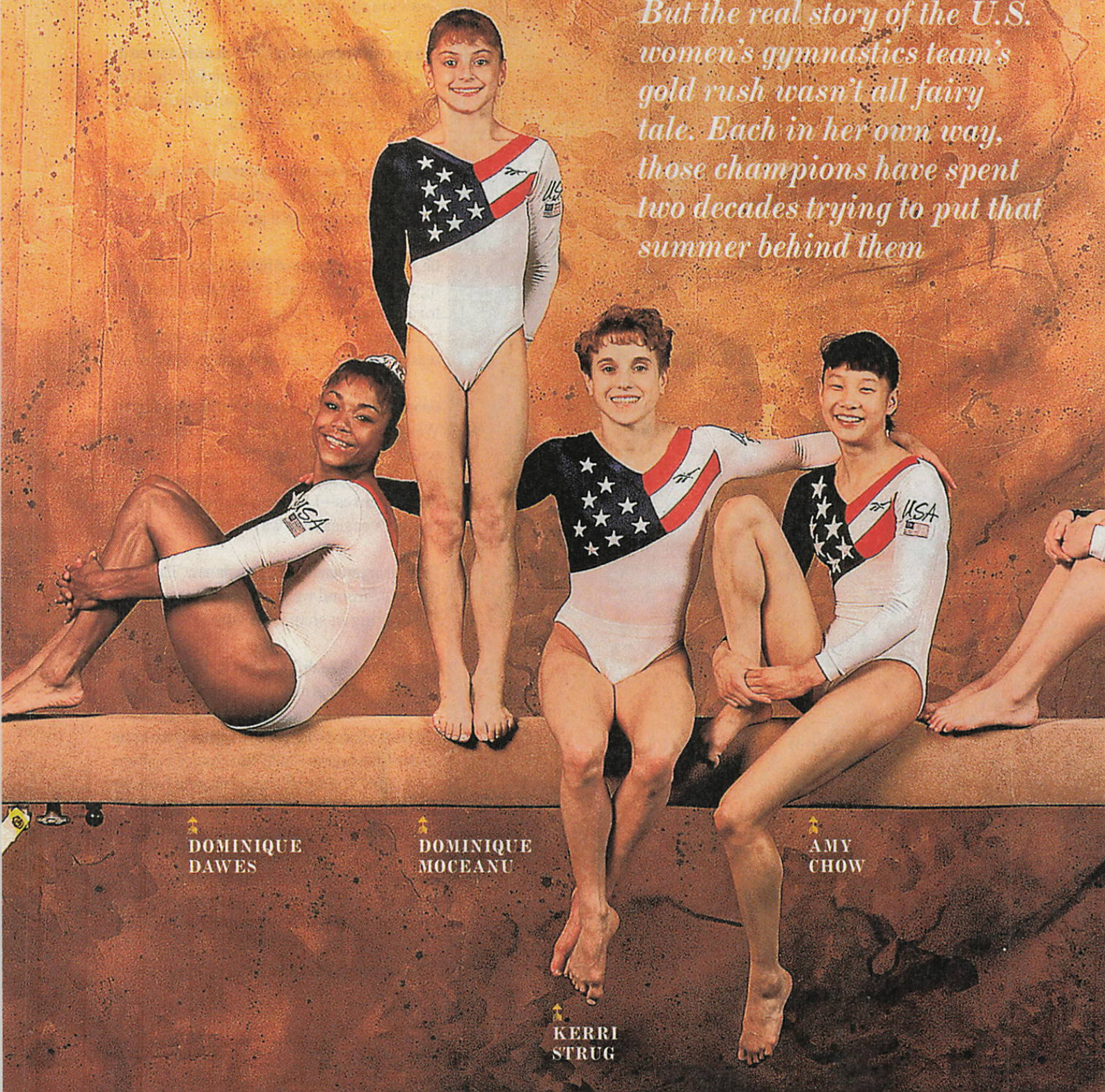
I guess I consider myself retired, but I still like to get in there with guys who are training, go at it a bit. It's fun to stay competitive that way.

If I *was* coming back to fight, I'd fight f------ anybody. □

W A
T N

THE MAGNIFIC

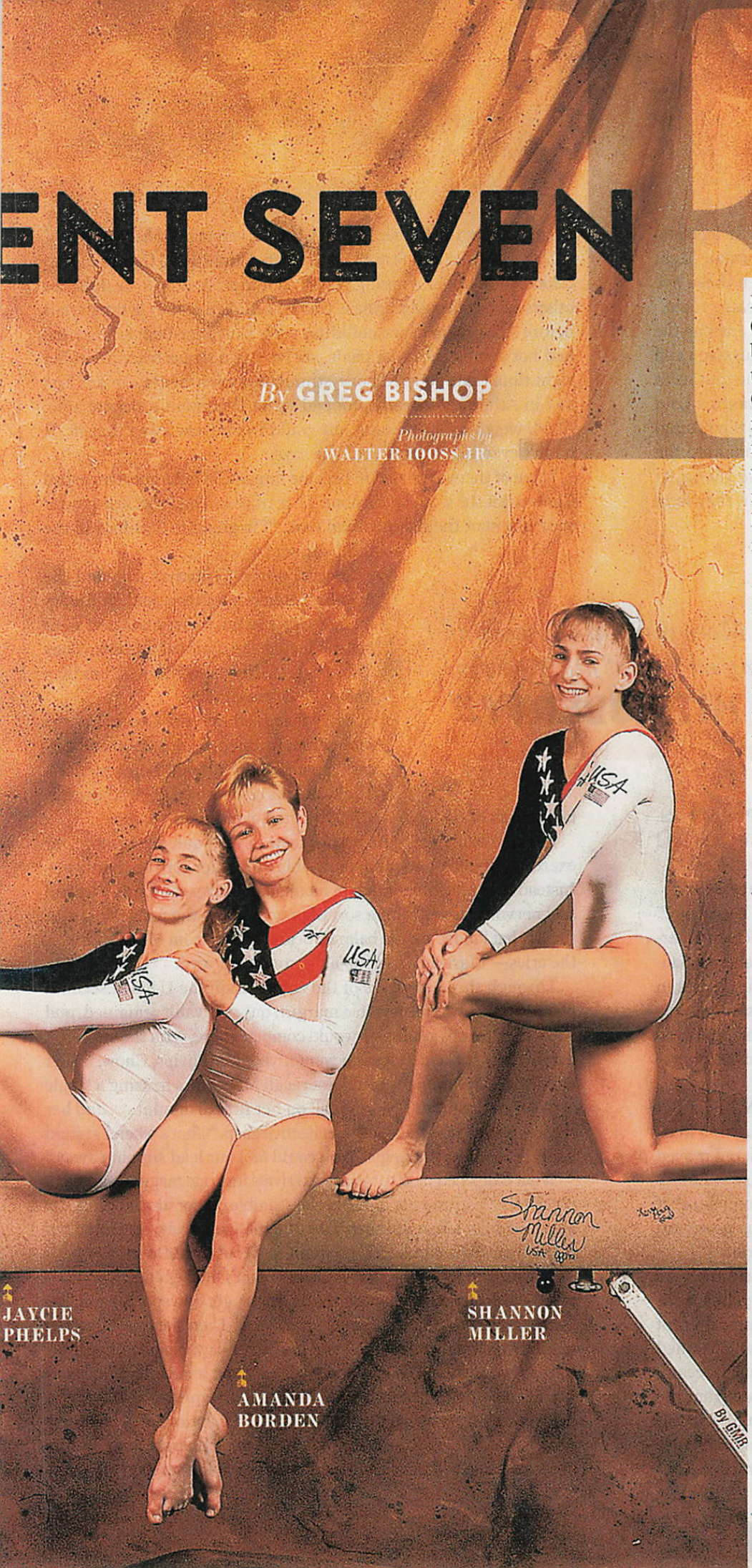
At the Atlanta Olympics seven girls united a nation with an unlikely triumph. But the real story of the U.S. women's gymnastics team's gold rush wasn't all fairy tale. Each in her own way, those champions have spent two decades trying to put that summer behind them



ENT SEVEN

By GREG BISHOP

Photographs by WALTER IOOSS JR.



ROM 34 STORIES above the flat expanse of Oklahoma City, the view spreads endlessly beyond the floor-to-ceiling windows. But the crowd assembled at the International Gymnastics Hall of Fame dinner is looking back instead of down. It's mid-May inside a ballroom at the Petroleum Club, where waiters clad in tuxedos serve filet mignon in mushroom-Merlot sauce, and highlights of America's most famous gymnasts unspool across projection screens.

"Good gracious," whispers Shannon Miller, winner of seven Olympic medals. "We were so young."

The images depict the gymnasts as time remembers them: a collective of pint-sized teenagers at the 1996 Games in Atlanta, their faces absent makeup, their bodies without an ounce of fat, their bangs arched outward across their foreheads.

Twists. Turns. Contortions. Flips. That's how they earned their nickname: the Magnificent Seven.

"You should go back to that hairstyle," Jaycie Phelps jokes to Amanda Borden, who 20 years ago sported a now-regrettable feathery bowl cut.

"Hey," Borden responds, "it was the '90s."

They're grown up now, these women who submitted themselves to what amounted to a sociological experiment: Take seven Olympians aged 14 to 19, make them celebrities overnight, put them on Wheaties boxes and swell their bank accounts beyond their wildest expectations; then send them out into the world they had ignored while perfecting their craft, and watch their lives fork in every direction. See what happens as they inch or walk or run, not *toward* fame but *away* from it, an evolution in reverse. Observe them holding on to stardom for years . . . or letting go immediately, traveling at different speeds toward normalcy and middle age as the spotlight dims.

All seven of them married. Six have children. Five—Miller, Borden, Phelps, Dominique Moceanu and Amy Chow—are honored guests at the IGHF banquet.

Dominique Dawes and Kerri Strug could not join them. But that's normal. Eight years have passed since even these five women last gathered in the same room.

On the screens, the video ends as the Americans finish atop the Russians and the Romanians to capture the first team all-around women's gymnastics gold medal in U.S. history. That's them, singing the national anthem from atop the medal podium, eyes wet—*so young*. At Table 26, all these years later, they fight back another round of tears.

On her first day in Atlanta, Moceanu—at 14, weighing 75 pounds—couldn't find any swag that fit. She says,

"I HADN'T EVEN HIT PUBERTY."

"Remember afterward," Phelps asks, "when we ate gummy bears? We would eat an arm one day, the body the next."

"Wow," Miller says. "Twenty years."

Borden: "I guess we've all been busy."

"Guys, guys. . . . *Guys!*" Moceanu interrupts as she hoists a glass of Cabernet Sauvignon. The others raise their glasses in unison. "I want to do a cheers. It's always tough to get us all back together. But I'm so glad, after everything, that we're here now."

THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN arrived in Atlanta roughly a week before the Olympics and moved into a fraternity house at Emory University where they had their own chef and security detail as well as newly installed televisions in each room.

They weren't a team so much as longtime foes who now happened to be competing together. They had different coaches. The two gymnasts who trained under Béla and Marta Károlyi, Moceanu and Strug, were kept separate from the others, eating and preparing by themselves. "We were competitors first," says Dawes. Still, seven relative strangers connected at that frat house, like an Olympic version of *The Real World*.

Dawes, Miller and Strug had competed at the 1992 Games in Barcelona, with Miller winning two silver and three bronze medals; the others each collected a bronze. Chow had fallen at the Olympic trials before Atlanta, her face colliding with a balance beam. Moceanu had not competed at the trials, shelved by a stress fracture in her right tibia that required bone-stimulation treatments. On her first day in Atlanta, Moceanu stopped by an Olympian welcome area. At 14, weighing 75 pounds, she couldn't find any swag that fit. "I hadn't even hit puberty yet," she says.

None of them expected to become famous. When reporters asked Chow what she would have done if her trials fall had cost her a roster spot, she shot them a quizzical look. "I'm going to Stanford in the fall," she said.

Several of the gymnasts watched the opening ceremony together in their Emory living room, placing their hands over their hearts during the national anthem. They didn't necessarily expect to win, but they knew they were capable.

Later they filed into the Georgia Dome for podium training, where 32,000 admirers screamed throughout their practices. The Russians complained about the noise, but chants of "U.S.A.! U.S.A.!" washed over them.

Looking back, the team events themselves—balance beam, floor exercise, uneven bars and vault—blur together for the gymnasts. Instead they remember random moments: Borden consoling a tearful and nervous Dawes with a sort of prayer before the uneven bars . . . the fly that landed on the balance beam, inches from Miller's face . . . the cries—"Marry me, Amanda!"—from the crowd.

Through three-quarters of the competition the U.S. led second-place Russia by a comfortable margin; only the vault remained, and six of each team's gymnasts would compete there, with the strongest competitors up last. Moceanu went fifth, after Phelps, Chow, Miller and Dawes. Teammates could not recall Moceanu's missing a single attempt in training. Then she fell on her first dismount . . . *and* her second, as the crowd let loose a collective gasp. "That's when I started to get scared," says Phelps. "You could feel our lead slipping away."

What happened next turned seven rivals into one magnificent team. Strug went last, and not only did she stumble on her first landing, she also heard her left ankle snap. Her coach, Béla Károlyi, implored her to push on. "You can do it!" he shouted. "You! Can! Do it!"

Strug set up for her second vault, her team's final chance. She whispered the positive affirmations she'd been taught by a sports psychologist: *You will do this. You're strong. You're fast.* Then she took off as her teammates watched from the end of the runway. No one knew how hurt she really was. Her ankle felt loose, almost unattached. She worried about falling. She told herself, Make it to the springboard. And she did, springing, twisting, turning, falling and . . . sticking the landing. As celebration erupted all around, Strug remembers telling doctors not to damage her lucky vaulting shoes. The ankle surged with pain.

PETER READ MILLER

VAULTING AHEAD

KERRI STRUG 38
Married Robert Fischer in 2010; son Tyler William, 4, and daughter Alayna Madaleine, 2. Works for the U.S. Department of Justice and as a motivational speaker based out of Tucson.

DOMINIQUE DAWES 39
Married Jeff Thompson in 2013; two children, ages 2 years and 9 months. Works as a broadcaster, coach and motivational speaker, based out of Washington, D.C.

AMANDA BORDEN 39
Married Brad Cochran in 2006; daughter Kennedy, 9, and sons Brody, 6, and Josh, 1. Owns and coaches at two gyms near Phoenix. Provides gymnastics commentary on television.

AMY CHOW 38
Married Jason Ho in 2010; sons Timmy, 4, and Matty, 1. Works these days as a pediatrician in northern California.

DOMINIQUE MOCEANU 34
Married Michael Canales in 2006; daughter Carmen Noel, 8, and son Vincent Michael, 7. Owns a jewelry line, Creations by C&C. Works as a coach, choreographer and motivational speaker out of Cleveland.

JAYCIE PHELPS 36
Married Dave Marus in 2014. Owns and operates Jaycie Phelps Athletic Center in Greenfield, Ind., where she oversees roughly 600 students each week.

SHANNON MILLER 39
Married John Falconetti in 2007; son John Rocco, 6, and daughter Sterling Diane, 3. Cancer survivor. Operates her own gym in Jacksonville. Works as a motivational speaker and broadcaster.

Later, an international television audience transfixed by seven tiny teenagers watched as they ascended the gold medal platform. Strug was snug in Károlyi's arms. She had dreamed of that exact moment for 12 years, ever since she had watched Mary Lou Retton accept a gold medal in 1984. She always figured she would look just like Retton, a smile spread wide across her face, and yet one small detail also nagged at her: She wasn't wearing pants.

The New York Times, meanwhile, placed the Magnificent Seven among America's elite all-time Olympians, writing that "until now, [the U.S.] has never had a team of women capture so many hearts, imaginations and a gold medal on the world's biggest sporting stage."

Strug has never so much as practiced a vault again. Sometimes she can't believe how she reacted to the win, with a mixture of emotions rather than pure joy, or that she cared even a little about her missing pants. She wanted to celebrate with her teammates and eat a veggie burger. She wanted to rehab in hopes of competing in the individual events. (She didn't.) At 18, she had no idea she would spend the next 20 years simultaneously reliving that moment and seeking to move away from it.

STRUG FOUND her pants and went straight to the hospital, where reporters had camped out in the lobby. While she dealt with two torn ligaments, her teammates sped to Planet Hollywood to attend a party thrown by Bruce Willis and Demi Moore. They later met with the second incarnation of the Dream Team, posing with Shaquille O'Neal and Penny Hardaway. In one snapshot O'Neal lifted Moceanu, lying sideways, above his head, like a standing press. "We were maybe up to their hips," Phelps says.

The whirlwind continued. Phelps and Borden visited the Olympic Park wearing disguises, baseball hats and sunglasses covering their faces. The gymnasts later lunched with President Bill Clinton and toured the White House. Strug appeared on *Beverly Hills 90210* and *Saturday Night Live*. Someone eventually asked Borden if there was anything left in her life to accomplish. She was 19.

SLIM GYM
The Americans stuck together in victory—except for Strug, who was carried off by Károlyi (right) and then did her own thing.

NEAL PRESTON

They were children, really, if not in age, then in life experience. They had spent their formative years holed up inside gymnasiums, preparing for the Olympics, but it hit with a force that none of them could have anticipated. Fans sent so many flowers to the frat house that bouquets lined the staircase. Boxes of letters sat unopened on the porch. News outlets across the world wanted interviews. Meanwhile, there was Moceanu in the kitchen, holding brownies in both hands. "Have you tried these?" she asked no one in particular. She had never enjoyed a brownie before.

In the aftermath, while the security detail took the gymnasts to Dairy Queen for Blizzards, commercial interests assumed a primary role. The U.S. coaches met at the house and discussed keeping the seven athletes together post-Olympics in order to maximize their earning potential. The majority of them believed the gymnasts needed to put off college and tour right away. One left the room thinking, "This *whole thing* was about money."

The celebrity spin cycle had already started to alter their paths, even as the gymnasts themselves remained relatively unsophisticated. When Miller went on *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*, she arrived without makeup, wearing jeans, a T-shirt and tennis shoes. "Oh, sweetie," one NBC employee told her, "you can't wear *that*."

The tour ballooned from 34 cities to more than 90 performances, and the gymnasts traversed the country in their own bus, rock star contortionists performing their Olympic routines to sold-out crowds. Moceanu ate French toast at every opportunity. They went shopping, compared malls. And still they competed—in who could pull off the

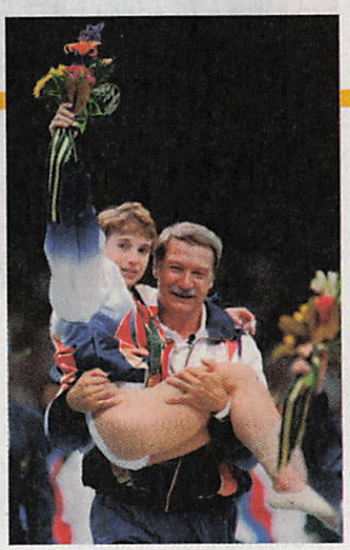
best pranks, putting milk in someone else's chalk or hiding each other's costumes or changing the music for routines. *Those wacky little gymnasts!*

Six of them, anyway. Strug did a separate tour on weekends, attending UCLA during the week. She eventually joined the others, but a schism had developed. "She had a different opportunity, and that's fine, but it divided us," says Moceanu. "Because we were a team, and that's how we should have stayed. It just didn't seem right."

Or . . . "The other girls were jealous," says Leigh Steinberg, Strug's agent for about a year following the Atlanta Games. "Kerri was not billed as the star going into those Olympics. But she came into stardom."

After the Olympics someone asked Borden if there was anything left in her life to accomplish.

SHE WAS 19.



WHEN Steinberg first met Strug, after the Olympics, he couldn't believe "how sheltered and abnormal an adolescence she'd [lived]." No dates. Little junk food. Minimal social interaction outside of gymnastics. "Like the girl in the bubble," he says. To various extents, they all were.

As the gymnasts shifted in 1997 back into lives that were no longer normal, Strug was the first to try to distance herself from Olympic renown. She had gone on *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, rung the opening bell at the New York Stock Exchange and been carried (again) onto the field during a *Monday Night Football* game. "It wasn't one of those things where you're like, Jeez, I could never run that fast," Steinberg says. "America could relate to Kerri Strug."

Strug, meanwhile, wanted to relate to everyday Americans. She had always been shy and sheltered, and she craved a normal college experience after everything settled down. Her parents pushed her to attend UCLA immediately, a decision that she came to agree with only after she lived outside her bubble. "I had to get my life in order," she says.

On some level, all seven young women identified and wrestled with the same themes, especially right after their tours ended in late 1997. They weighed capitalizing on their newfound fame against moving into the rest of their lives, and they transitioned at different speeds. Some felt more at ease around celebrities than in typical social situations.

Before Dawes moved to New York City and appeared on Broadway as the cheerleader Patty Simcox in *Grease*, she answered the phone in her Orlando hotel room to a caller who identified himself as Prince (or as the Love Symbol, the name by which he was going at that time; she can't remember which). He wanted Dawes, the first African-American to win Olympic gymnastics gold, to star in his video for the song "Betcha by Golly, Wow!" Reacting as might reasonably be anticipated, Dawes hung up, certain the call was yet another prank. *It wasn't.* Prince summoned Dawes to his suburban Minnesota mansion, and when she arrived, in November 1996, he offered her something to drink. She asked for hot chocolate, and Prince made her some Swiss Miss. "My jaw dropped," she says. In the video she would play a freestyle dancer, but being a gymnast, she struggled to perform anything beyond a planned routine. Prince ended up hiring a choreographer for her.

Moceanu, for her part, carried her vault failure with her for years. She had fallen short of perfection, which meant she had fallen short of her father's expectations. Dimitry Moceanu had emigrated from Romania to Houston, where he owned a car dealership and dabbled in real estate. He wanted nothing more than for his daughter to become an Olympic champion, but he pushed her with anger and rage and sometimes, she says, with physical abuse.

Dimitry had arranged for his daughter to train with the Károlyis at their ranch outside Houston four years before the Atlanta Games. There she says she saw athletes "pushed through unreasonable workouts into dangerous pain," as with the shinbone she'd fractured shortly before the 1996 Games. Anyone who complained, she says, "was dismissed as weak or lazy or faking."

Exercises, she says, lasted for hours and were held outside, in punishing temperatures, with no food or water. After one performance that Károlyi considered especially poor, she says the coach made her stand on a scale in front of other gymnasts. She was not yet 14, and she weighed less than a Dober-

DOUG PENSINGER/GETTY IMAGES

man. On occasion, she says, Károlyi threatened to call her father following mistakes.

The Károlyis declined interview requests, but to Moceanu's general recollection Martha Károlyi emailed, "It is too bad she remembers only the hardship and doesn't remember the good times, the joy of achieving things." Strug, speaking from her own experiences, also disagrees with Moceanu. "I knew exactly what I was getting into," she says. "Did I like [the Károlyis] on a daily basis? No. But I chose to stay there. They made me mentally tough."

Moceanu, meanwhile, accused Dimitry of spending more than $1 million of her earnings. In 1997 her family home near the Károlyi gym flooded, ruining most of her Olympic memorabilia. In '98 she filed for emancipation from her parents in order to gain control over her finances.

She wondered: Would she ever be happy? Would she ever be normal?

In 2000, Moceanu retired from gymnastics, another medalist in search of a more standard life. Little did she know....

STRUG DECIDED to study abroad in 2000, the next Olympic year, electing to enroll in Semester at Sea. Her gymnastics career had taken her everywhere and nowhere—everywhere in that she traveled the world, competing in dozens of countries; nowhere in that wherever she journeyed, she wore a path from the hotel to the gym and back. She never actually saw anything. "I wanted to go to the places I had been and see the culture and immerse myself in it," she says. "It was liberating and scary, too."

Her athletic career had been scheduled to the minute. But in Semester at Sea, on a boat that docked at various countries to take in different cultures, Strug could do whatever she wanted. When they docked in India, she had no schedule, and so she wandered the streets as rickshaws whizzed past. In Saigon she played with young children and bought them toys, and visited a pottery village near Hanoi. She fell in love with Cuba, all the houses painted bright blue and orange and yellow, the whole country stuck in time. She even took in a Fidel Castro speech. "It was really interesting to formulate my own thoughts and opinions," she says. "I wasn't used to doing that."

Back at Stanford in the spring of 2001, Strug took the same statistics class as Chow, who was studying to become a pediatrician. Chow had trained for and competed at the '00 Games in between her studies, at once delaying her transition but also moving forward. She earned her undergraduate degree in '02 and completed medical school, also at Stanford, in '07. She took up pole vaulting (career best: 13' 5¼") and competitive diving, confirming that she loved flying through the air, twisting and turning and flipping, whether she landed on her feet, head or back.

Phelps and Borden became coaches, something neither could have seen coming in Atlanta. Moceanu's life, meanwhile, carried on like a soap opera. On one rainy night in December 2007, while she was finishing her finals at John Carroll University, nine months pregnant, she opened a package with bubbly handwriting on the front.

LATE BLOOMER
Strug made the late-night rounds on *Leno* and *SNL*, and superfans Hillary, Chelsea and Bill Clinton feted the team (minus Miller) at the White House.

Inside was a letter from a woman named Jennifer Bricker, who wrote that Moceanu's parents had given her up for adoption shortly after she was born. Later, as the sisters began corresponding, Bricker dropped another surprise: She had been born without legs. The two remain in regular contact, and Bricker often visits Moceanu at her home outside Cleveland.

Moceanu wrote an autobiography. She lost more of her Olympic keepsakes when a second fire damaged another family home, this one in Spring, Texas, in 2008. Her father died that year from cancer, and Béla Károlyi surfaced at the funeral—the first time Moceanu says she had interacted with him in years. "We don't have a relationship," she says. "It's nonexistent."

That same year, the Magnificent Seven were inducted into the U.S. Olympic Hall of Fame. All seven made the trip to Chicago, and it marked the last time they were all together. "That's sad," Phelps says.

Moceanu graduated from John Carroll in 2009 with a degree in business management. By then most of the gymnasts had transitioned away from celebrity, the occasional appearance or speech notwithstanding. Their moment no longer defined them the way it once did. But it always will, in part. As Moceanu walked across the stage at her graduation, the crowd started to chant, "U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!"

FROM LEFT: MICHAEL CAULFIELD/AP; MARY ELLEN MATTHEWS/NBC/AP

In 2008, the women were inducted into the U.S. Olympic Hall of Fame. It is the last time they were all together.

"THAT'S SAD," PHELPS SAYS.

OF ALL THE GYMNASTS, Dawes and Miller remained in the public eye the longest. Dawes worked first as a gymnastics broadcaster and public speaker, and she was appointed to President Barack Obama's Council on Fitness, Sports and Nutrition in 2010. That August, she and Chow received retroactive bronze medals from the '00 Olympics, after the Chinese team that placed ahead of them was disqualified for using an underage competitor.

Miller overcame an early fear of public speaking by giving free talks at Rotary clubs and for nonprofits. At first she mostly detailed her Olympic experience, but the more she spoke, the more her focus evolved. In 2010, three years after graduating from law school at Boston College, she started a company focused on lifestyle, health and fitness for women.

In January 2011, Miller was diagnosed with a rare form of ovarian cancer for which chemotherapy treatments caused her hair loss, pain, fatigue and nausea. Doctors removed a cyst roughly the size of a baseball. Miller attacked cancer the way she approached gymnastics. She was never the fastest competitor or the most graceful; she outworked everyone en route to her place in Olympic lore, as America's most decorated gymnast.

Strug attended the London Olympics in 2012, and after Team USA wrapped up its first gold medal since the 1996 Games she turned to her husband and gushed, "Their parents must be so proud." Her perspective had changed that dramatically. "I appreciate when people tell me where they were when I did the vault," she says. "But in my daily life, I'm just trying to get my kids off to preschool."

As the 20th anniversary of those 1996 Games approached, Dawes married in 2013 and Phelps followed suit a year later. Dawes became the sixth team member to have children. After years of dating Mr. Right-Nows, she'd found Mr. Right, a teacher named Jeff Thompson. They met online, only to realize that they shared several mutual friends; now they have two young daughters. "I'm totally sleep-deprived," she says. "I'm forgetful. I wear sweats all day long."

After Prince and Broadway and Obama, it turns out that Dawes most wanted the same things as her teammates. A husband. Children. Work that doesn't interfere too often with family. . . . Normalcy, more or less. First, though, she had to learn how to relax. Her life had been so regimented, so focused on achievement. What made Dawes an incredible gymnast sometimes made her an overly critical human being. "You walk around seeing what needs to be corrected without seeing what's so amazing in life," Thompson told her.

"That was my life for 18 years," she says. "I had to rewire my brain. I had to learn how to let go. Look at our team in '96. You didn't see us smile; we were pretty intense. That was the culture and the sport back then. That's why I don't want my daughters to train for the Olympics."

Olympians choose the oddest of lives, spending thousands of hours training in and obsessing over worlds that are mostly obscure, putting off college and children and hobbies. They chase a moment and then it's gone, even for those who find what they wanted—or they find out that what they sought wasn't actually what they wanted at all.

In the case of seven athletes who lived together in a frat house and sang Warren G's "Regulate," 1996 marked an end and a beginning. Everything before led to that moment. Everything after led away. □

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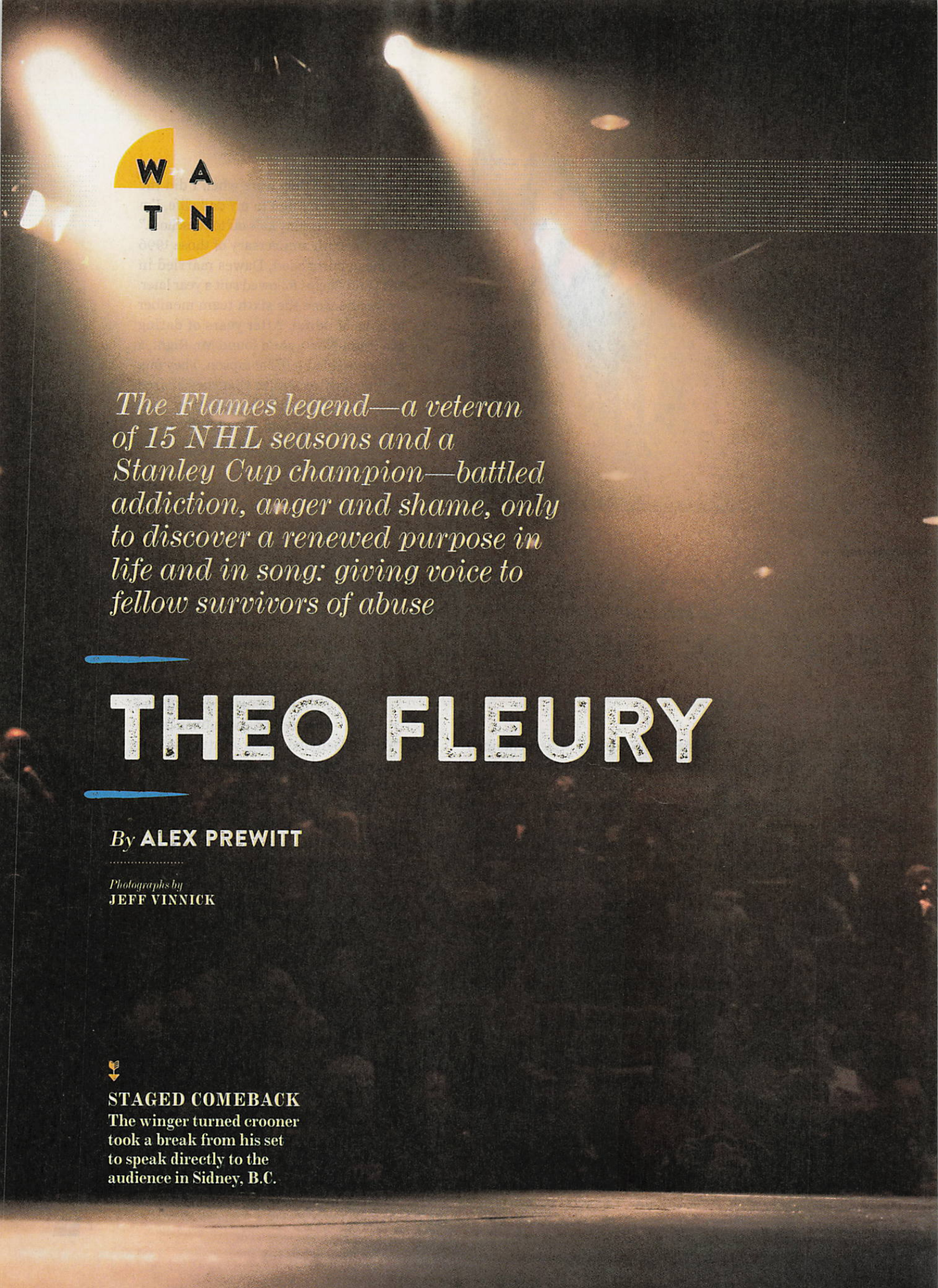


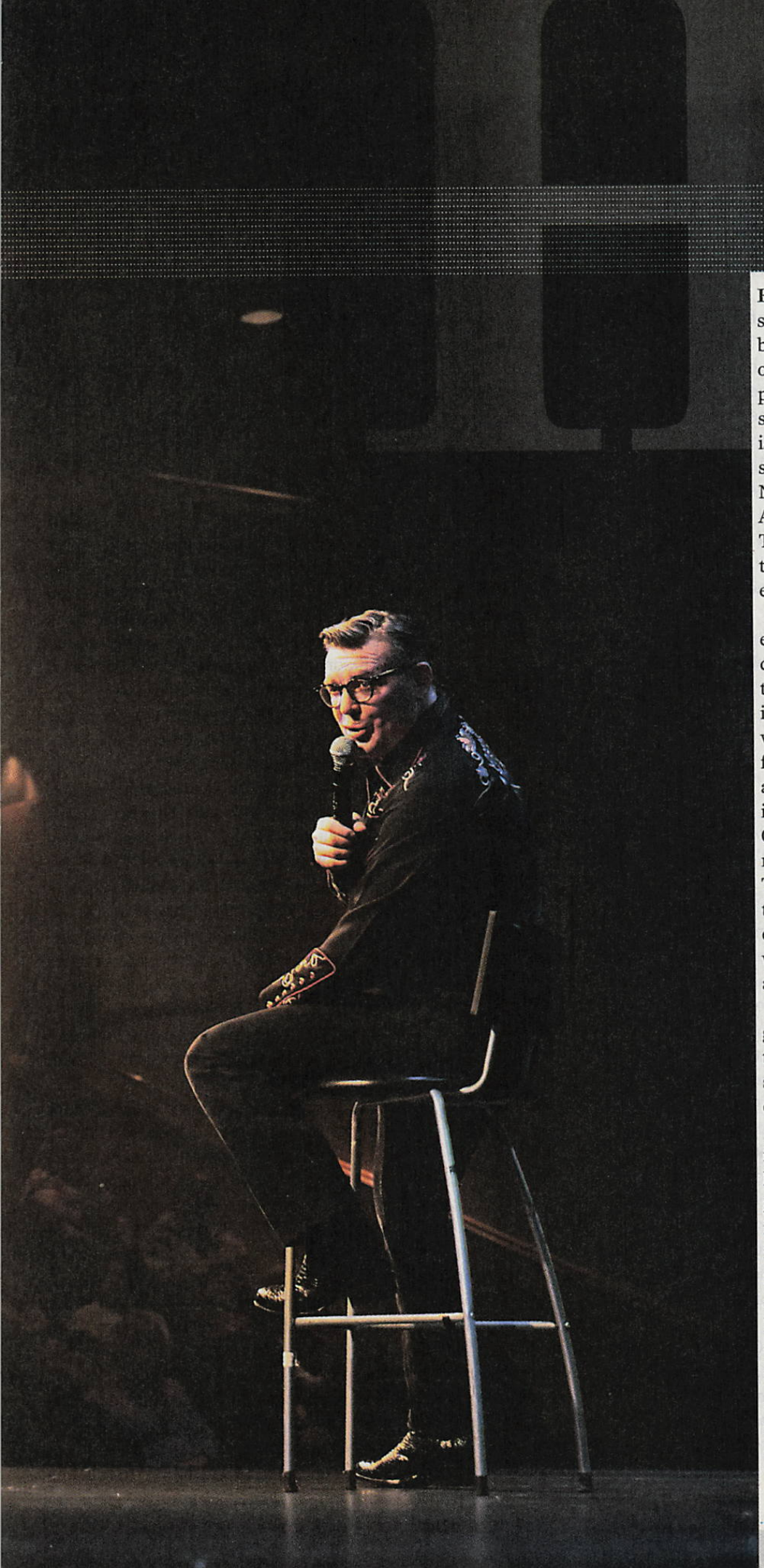
The Flames legend—a veteran of 15 NHL seasons and a Stanley Cup champion—battled addiction, anger and shame, only to discover a renewed purpose in life and in song: giving voice to fellow survivors of abuse

THEO FLEURY

By **ALEX PREWITT**

Photographs by
JEFF VINNICK

STAGED COMEBACK
The winger turned crooner took a break from his set to speak directly to the audience in Sidney, B.C.



E HIDES in the shadows, stage left, and stares into the light past the curtains. He breathes in slow, and then out fast. The four other members of the band have taken their places. The crowd waits for him. "F------ sold out," he says. "Now I'm nervous." This is unusual; he had always loved putting on shows. For 15 seasons he dazzled crowds at NHL rinks, a 5' 6", point-per-game pit bull. And now, on a rainy Saturday in March, Theo Fleury walks onstage in an auditorium near the Sidney, B.C., airport to entertain a packed house of 310.

Many bought tickets for the simple novelty of seeing their favorite player belt out country tunes. A local junior-B team, in the midst of its postseason, came seeking inspiration from a legendary right wing who won a Stanley Cup. Two fans splurged for the Silver Package, which cost $175 and included having their pictures taken in the dressing room with Fleury's 2002 Olympic gold medal draped around their necks. Dozens of others brought their T-shirts, hats and pucks, hoping to get them signed. For weeks southbound drivers on Highway 17 had glanced out of their windows and seen the cover of Fleury's album splashed onto a billboard.

The lights fade. The sound of two guitars pick up. "Ladies and gentlemen," the house manager says over the loudspeakers, "here's proof that good things come in small packages."

Fleury's voice is deep and hardened, inspired by the artists his grandfather loved, like Johnny Cash. He believes his grandfather found peace in music, stroking the fiddle during family singalongs in rural Manitoba. Hockey once served a similar purpose for Fleury. "The one constant thing that made sense," he says. But he does not skate much anymore, too competitive to play for fun, too out of shape to play competitively. None of his lyrics mention the sport—or the 455 goals, 633 assists and 1,840 penalty minutes—that made him famous, either. Instead, the

10-track album *I Am Who I Am* has cuts like "Sick As Your Secrets" and "Road To Misery." They trace the long climb up from rock bottom.

Much of the audience came for who Fleury is now, 48 years old and sober for the past 11, the superstar whose shame melted away like ice. They came to hear the voice that speaks for the estimated one in three Canadians who have been abused—physically, emotionally, verbally—as children; for the 95% of youth sexual assaults that go unreported in Canada, according to a 2013 study in *Frontiers in Psychiatry*; for the believed 70% of survivors who then seek drugs and alcohol to soothe their wounds.

They came to feel empowered by the man tapping his leather cowboy boots and raising his fist as he sings the chorus of the first song.

I am who I am
I stand for what I believe
To win from within
I am real/I am me/And I am free.
—"I Am Who I Am"

HE WALKS through the lower bowl of Scotiabank Saddledome, the rink where he spent 11 straight years as a Flame, starting in 1988. Two days before the concert, Fleury has driven from his home outside of Calgary to watch the team's morning skate. Here they remember him with joy. In the rafters hangs the banner honoring the Stanley Cup champions from 1989, when Fleury was a rookie. Downstairs, painted onto the wall outside the home dressing room, is the celebratory scene moments after Calgary clinched in Montreal. Fleury can be found in the front row, close to the grail. His whole body looks exhausted, except for one pointer finger extending in triumph.

Two decades later Fleury left Calgary with a similar image. Out of the league for six years while indefinitely suspended for violating the league's substance-abuse policy, he attempted a comeback with the Flames before the 2009–10 season. He shed weight and returned to playing shape. He convinced commissioner Gary Bettman of his sobriety and had the suspension lifted. At an exhibition game against the Islanders, the home crowd chanted "Theo! Theo!" when he took the ice—and again when he deked and scored the eventual winner in a shootout. Eleven days later the preseason ended, and he retired. "When that went in the net," he says, "I was good."

While Fleury still wonders if his body could have even handled an 82-game schedule, he knows that returning for a 16th season would have challenged his mind even more. Two weeks after Calgary's season opener, Fleury's autobiography, *Playing With Fire*, was released. He conceived of the book as a way to showcase his on-ice legacy: seven All-Star Game appearances; the Olympic gold in Salt Lake City; the indelible image of him after scoring the OT winner against Edmonton during the '91 playoffs, sliding on both knees and spinning like a top.

FIRE ON ICE
Fleury had two assists in the 2002 Olympics (below), a year before he played his last games in the NHL, with Chicago (right).

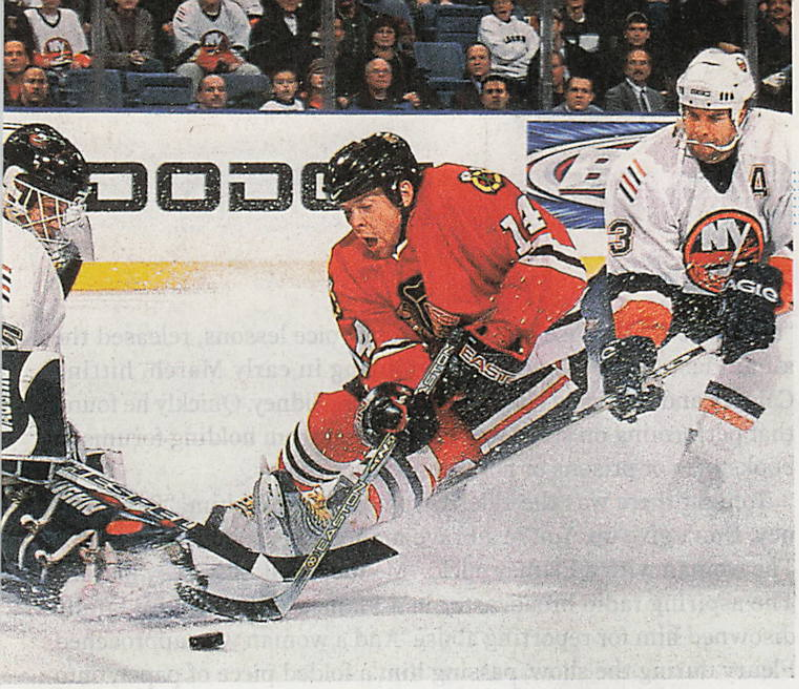
But the project took him into far darker territory. He detailed the booze and cocaine habits he developed as a teenager. The benders through strip clubs and casinos that lasted until dawn, at which point, he wrote, "I could pass out and not have to relive one moment of my miserable f------ existence." The crystal meth overdose and his first divorce. The decision to leave Chicago in 2003, when another failed drug test left him with two options: receive treatment for at least two years or retire. "I didn't want help," he says. The memory of sitting on his couch in Santa Fe shortly thereafter, swigging vodka and holding a pistol. "How did it taste?" he wrote. "It tasted lonely. Cold, lonely and black."

In the book Fleury publicly disclosed for the first time the sexual abuse he endured at the hands of his junior hockey coach Graham James. The assaults, Fleury wrote, began when he was 15 and occurred "once or twice a week for the next two years." He felt imprisoned, terrified of revealing his secret and becoming "stigmatized forever as the kid who was molested by his coach. The Victim. . . .

"I was tied up, maybe not with rope, but it was the same thing," he wrote. "He was my coach. He was helping me. He knew so much about hockey. He controlled my f------ destiny."

Fleury wondered how the world would react to *Playing With Fire*. Generally the public lauded his courage and respected his honesty. For hockey fans the revelations helped explain Fleury's intense, often enraged style on the ice. But the real answer—and one he didn't know he needed—came at his first book signing that October. He tells this

BRIAN BAHR/GETTY IMAGES



LOU CAPOZZOLA

"I was a lot more short, temper-wise," Fleury says. "Anger for me was protection.

STAY OUT OF THIS GUY'S WAY."

story often. The audience in Sidney will hear it too. It goes like this:

Among a crowd of 400 at a Toronto bookstore Fleury spots a man clutching the book against his chest and looking at the floor. "He was in survival mode," Fleury says. For the next hour and a half, Fleury tracks the man as he shuffles through the long line, closer and closer to the table where Fleury sits. Finally, when the man's turn arrives, he leans close and whispers, "Me too."

That is what is at the core of our healing: finding our purpose.
—Conversations With a Rattlesnake, 2014

HE STANDS alone at the microphone. This happens at every gig for Theo Fleury and the Death Valley Rebels. The idea came from Paddy McCallion, the band's manager and lead guitarist. Midway through the show, Fleury leaves so the Rebels can play a short set. And after, he returns to an empty stage to tell his story. "It's not about being top of the charts," says McCallion, who met Fleury during his one season with the Blackhawks. "It's not about anything like that. It's a whole different message we're bringing to the table."

Fleury's path to recovery had only just begun with the man at the bookstore. During each signing and every interview for *Playing With Fire*, Fleury was retraumatized by reliving the details of the abuse. Without having the tools to handle the pain, he clung to hate—at the Canadian justice system, which had previously pardoned James for another sex crime after he had served 3½ years in prison; at James, who ultimately pleaded guilty in December 2011 to abusing Fleury and another former player; at himself, for the shame he carried. "I was a lot more short, temper-wise," he says. "Anger for me was protection. Stay out of this guy's way."

Just as at the bookstore, though, one chance encounter moved Fleury forward. In May 2012, at a conference in Winnipeg, Fleury met an occupational therapist from Victoria, B.C., named Kim Barthel. A specialist in relational trauma, with field experience in Kosovo, Gaza and post-Katrina New Orleans, Barthel helped Fleury dig deeper than James's abuse. She explained how Fleury's chaotic childhood left him predisposed to addictive behavior; how James preyed on young Theo's need for approval from an attachment figure. Says Barthel, "He's come to that place of seeing how it was all that early-childhood stuff that made him sexually vulnerable to a predator."

"That's when I realized, there wasn't anything I could've done differently," Fleury says. "She talked about trauma like nobody I'd ever run into at any point. I thought it was my fault. All that guilt, all that anger was still pretty prevalent in my life until I met her."

In 2014, Fleury and Barthel turned their talks into his second book, *Conversations with a Rattlesnake*. It is written as a dialogue between the two authors, about healing from trauma. Fleury likes the rattlesnake metaphor. "It's not a predator," he says. "It sheds its skin and reinvents itself."

Pretty soon the pair was hitting the road together, hosting forums around Canada. Once, in Calgary, a 12-year-old described his abuse to a room of 250, mostly adults. Three years ago, in Nanaimo, B.C., a man revealed himself to a room full of survivors as both a victim and a violent offender. "And nobody was antagonistic," Barthel says. "Everyone oriented in his direction [because he] identified with the whole cycle of trauma."

This is what gives Fleury his rush today—not fifths or eight-balls or hat tricks but helping others, as he puts it, "sit with their s---." As he tells the audience before the music begins again, "Something that we think is uncommon is actually the most common thing that happens in the world, and that's trauma. And so it's really been an absolutely incredible journey."

Gettin' rid of all our shame/Let's lift our heads and never bow them again/ Courage through and through.
—"Walk With Thousands"

HE SITS in the backseat, passenger's side, riding to Barthel's house. It was past midnight when Fleury finally left the theater, after speaking to the junior hockey players and showing them his gold medal. Before that he spent about an hour behind the merchandise table—signing jerseys, smiling for pictures and hearing the two-word whisper he always does.

"How many *me too*'s did you count?" Barthel asks Fleury in the car.

"Oh, at least 30," he replies.

At first, music was a bucket-list venture, another way to reconnect with the spirituality of his indigenous Métis roots—the fiddles, the firesides, the singalongs. So he produced his first song with a friend in Winnipeg, then wrote more with McCallion, who then formed a backup band. "Death Valley Rebels," Fleury says, "are those who refuse to die." He took voice lessons, released the album last October and started touring in early March, hitting Calgary and Medicine Hat, Alberta, before Sidney. Quickly he found that performing on stage was no different from holding forums in bookstores or prisons or hotel conference rooms.

Tonight there was the elderly woman who told him, "Safe journey. Don't give up. You're a brave man. Prime minister one day." The woman with a Flames puck: "Me too, a fellow hockey player." The aspiring radio broadcaster in a Flames T-shirt whose family disowned him for reporting abuse. And a woman who approached Fleury during the show, passing him a folded piece of paper, onto which she had typed, I TOO AM A SURVIVOR.

"When the guys in the band see it firsthand, they are like, S---, I get it," McCallion says. "Now I know why we're doing this."

"When the guys in the band see [his connections with fans], they are like, I get it," bandmate McCallion says. "Now **I KNOW WHY WE'RE DOING THIS."**

REASON TO LISTEN
Through touring with his band and sharing his story, Fleury has formed connections with his fans across Canada.

Fleury feels the voices increasing in volume, advancing the conversation. Look at the other athletes who have revealed their own traumas, he says: boxer Sugar Ray Leonard, pitcher R.A. Dickey, judoka Kayla Harrison and most recently former NHL center Patrick O'Sullivan. The week before the concert in Sidney, Lady Gaga had performed at the Oscars, flanked by sexual-assault survivors as she sang "Til It Happens To You," from *The Hunting Ground*, a documentary about campus rape. Fleury watched with his fiancée, Elle Presley, a fellow survivor of childhood abuse. Together they wept.

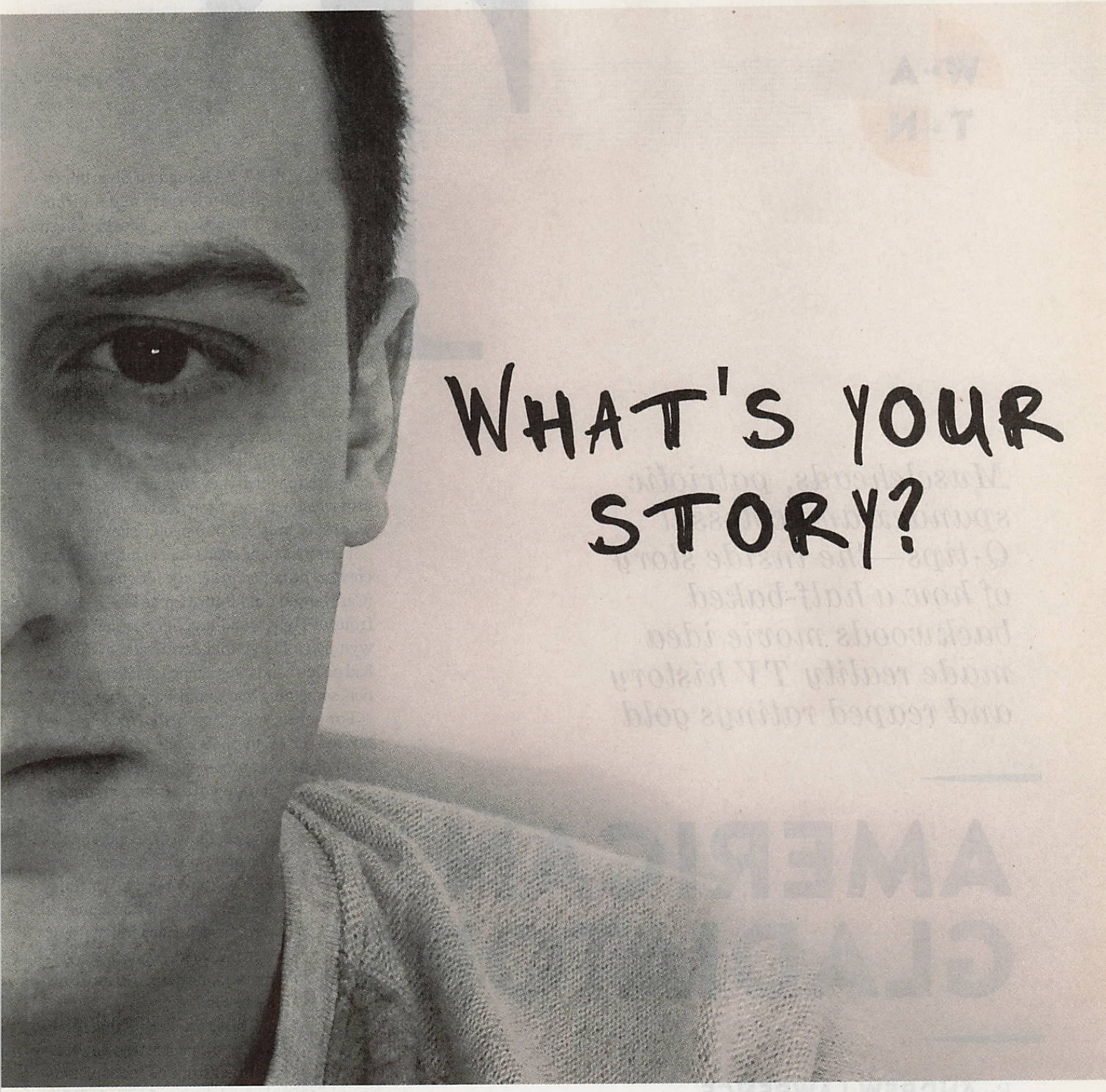
"People are becoming more comfortable," he says. But the work never stops. The next week he and Barthel will hold their 33rd *Conversations* forum in an aboriginal section of Ontario. In late April he will spend five days giving 12 speeches across the Northern Territories; in one community Fleury will hear allegations of an active sexual assaulter living there but will find no one willing to file a report. "That's the power of abuse, right there," he says. "What we're trying to do is take the shame out of it and speak about it openly."

This month Fleury will conduct the third Victor Walk, an event he created to raise awareness for childhood trauma. It goes from his Manitoba hometown of Russell, to Winnipeg, a journey of 279 miles. On the fifth and final day 11 other walks—from Halifax to Calgary to New York City—will simultaneously start across North America.

The first Victor Walk happened in 2013, starting at a child abuse monument in Toronto and ending on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. Beforehand Fleury and a friend wrote "Walk With Thousands" as an anthem. The lyrics are uplifting, projecting an image of a powerful force moving forward together: *We are no longer just a face in the crowd/We found our voice and now we'll sing it loud.*

As 1 a.m. nears, the song is playing on the car stereo. Fleury rests his hand on his fiancée's shoulder and looks out the window. The billboard fades in the rearview mirror, Theo Fleury watching over the road. □

bringchange2mind



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BRING CHANGE 2MIND

#MindOurFuture

Muscleheads, patriotic spandex and colossal Q-tips—the inside story of how a half-baked backwoods movie idea made reality TV history and reaped ratings gold

AMERICAN GLADIATORS

By **ANDREW LAWRENCE**

Photographs by
SAMUEL GOLDWYN TELEVISION/
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THIRTY-FOUR YEARS ago an Elvis impersonator named John Ferraro and an ironworker named Dan Carr took over a high school gym and put on a fund-raiser production for the people of Erie, Pa., originally called *King of the County*. The show was a Rust Belt rethinking of the coliseum spectacles of ancient Rome, in which strong men fought to the death for entertainment's sake.

The locals who accepted this challenge were far from mythic. They were electricians, truck drivers, car dealers—anyone who would savage his neighbor for $500. The feats of strength in which they engaged were crude: arm wrestling, tug-of-war. . . . The whole thing was set to music; 5,000 people showed up.

Ferraro had the good sense to hire a camera crew, as he hoped to sell the idea as a movie. (Carr bowed out.) But when he finally got in front of Hollywood macher Samuel Goldwyn Jr., Goldwyn told Ferraro that what he had on his hands was a much smaller production, something that would work better on TV.

For seven years *American Gladiators*—revised on TV to pit Average Joes against a team of superfit pros—enthralled a curious nation with its star-spangled spandex onesies, campy stage names, blow-dried personalities and punishing hits. When Bill Clinton copped to watching the show in the White House, it went from being a fratty, ironic viewing choice—"*Star Search* for the working man," Ferraro calls it—to a cult hit.

This is the story of that show, told by the people who powered the ratings machine, from its inauspicious start in 1989 through its conclusion in '96.

RAW MEAT

MICHAEL (GEMINI) HORTON, gladiator: Before *Gladiators*, I played football for the Patriots. I was trying to make the transition from athlete to actor.

DAN (NITRO) CLARK, gladiator: I'd just finished playing pro football with the L.A. Rams and then in Italy. I'd moved to Hollywood to be an

BULK-HEADED
The *Gladiators* cast, circa Season 1, was culled from hordes of auditioners.

NITRO *1989, '92, '94 to '95*
Seven years after publishing his first book, *Gladiator*, about his life in the limelight, Dan Clark, 52, is working on a second, *Cultivating Happiness*, about surviving a heart attack. He also organizes Gladiator Rock 'N Run, a 5K and 10K dash through the California mud.

extra on the HBO show *1st & Ten*, with O.J. Simpson, Lawrence Taylor, Roger Craig.... And while those guys would've crushed me on the field, they couldn't touch me on camera. I had a certain chutzpah that they didn't. Then, right when my Hollywood dream was running on fumes, I heard about a show that was looking for athletes who were good in front of the camera.

DERON (MALIBU) MCBEE, gladiator: I was working as a personal trainer when the guy riding the Lifecycle next to me saw that casting ad in the trades and said, "Dude, this sounds like you!"

GEMINI: The audition in 1988 was in L.A., at Lake Balboa Park in the Valley, but I was about two hours late because I couldn't figure out where it was. Finally, I stopped at a store to get a six-pack of beer and some peanuts—I was done looking for that thing! But then two really fit girls in athletic clothing walked in and I asked them if they had been at that audition. They said, Yeah, and they told me where it was. The people who showed up were overweight, some with knee braces on...

NITRO: When I tried out they had us do these stupid football drills.

GEMINI: ... and from that group they narrowed it down to 12 people—six guys, six girls. Then six—three guys and three girls: me, Nitro and Malibu; Zap [Raye Hollitt], Sunny [Cheryl Baldinger] and Lace [Marisa Pare].

NITRO: They had us pick from a bunch of character types—double personality, babes-and-waves, loud and cocky. I chose the last one. They put us on camera and asked us questions in character. They asked me what I ate, and I said, "Raw meat." What a tool I was.

"They asked us questions in character," recalls Nitro. "They asked me what I ate, and I said, 'Raw meat.' **WHAT A TOOL I WAS."**

THE BURNING BUSH

GEMINI: We shot the pilot at the Los Angeles Equestrian Center. It was horrible. We got paid $500 for the day and they kept us from nine one morning till 4 a.m. the next. The things they had us doing were ridiculous, all these games rigged up to give it the aura of a sports competition. There was horse manure everywhere—but that wasn't the most unbelievable thing. That would be Johnny Ferraro; he was always dressed like Elvis. *Always.* He walks into our trailer...

JOHN FERRARO, co-creator and executive producer: They were in a small, little room.

GEMINI: ... and he says, "I'm Johnny Ferraro. I own the show. And you guys are all gonna be big stars."

FERRARO: It was like when you see the burning bush. Even though I'd only done the small event in Erie, I saw what *Gladiators* could be.

GEMINI: All six of us, we're looking at him like: *We just did this s--- in horse manure, played these games that don't make any sense, and you're gonna make us stars? And you look like Elvis?! Yeah; good luck, pal.*

MIKE ADAMLE, announcer: The pilot was pooh-poohed by Goldwyn until he saw one event called Assault, where we had gladiators stationed at different air-gun stations, shooting tennis balls at contestants. In particular, the sight of one of the female gladiators got a big reaction. On that small moment he decided we had something.

FERRARO: We edited that tape down to seven minutes and took it to the 1988 National Association of Television Program Executives convention. This was back when syndication was in its day. We signed up stations from all over the country with a 13-episode order. Next thing I know, we're shooting inside Universal Studios' Stage 27.

NITRO: During those original tapings we couldn't get enough people from the studio tour to fill the audience, so they painted faces on planks.

FERRARO: We shot that first order in two weeks, very inexpensively. The production was ... *crude*. I thought, My God, all of these years of work and it all comes down to this?

ADAMLE: It was a constant evolution, getting the games right, getting the gladiators comfortable with the games. One key guy who put us over the top was our eventual referee, Larry Thompson; he was one of the Pac-10's top football officials. He spent, like, two weeks coming up with the rules for every single game.

FERRARO: We had pitched the whole thing as a late-night show, something that could go up against *Saturday Night Live*. After a while on the air the show picked up a real cult following and started getting better and better air times. That was enough to get us renewed.

GEMINI: That's when the budget got bigger.

FERRARO: That's when we got the set with the big columns. We got announcers from the football world, which gave us enormous credibility.

MALIBU 1991 to '92
Deron McBee has battled comic book characters on film (*Batman Forever, Mortal Kombat: Annihilation*); now the 54-year-old depicts them using markers, colored pencils and watercolors as an artist.

DALLAS 1994 to '98
After successful post-*Gladiators* forays into boxing and wrestling, Shannon Hall, 46, now trains MMA fighters. She'll be in Kenia Rosas's corner for her pro debut against champion judoka Mackenzie Dern on July 22.

GEMINI: Todd Christensen was great—but, man, what an arrogant dude. *Oh my God.* Bless his heart, but he just thought he was above it all. He *wasn't* enjoying himself.
FERRARO: Fran Tarkenton, Larry Csonka, Joe Theismann. . . .
JOE THEISMANN, announcer and former NFL QB: Gosh, I haven't thought about this in 20 years—yet I can picture the outfits they wore, the people that competed. It was fun to be there in the beginning, when we were basically building this thing on the run.
FERRARO: I pushed Goldwyn to put some music behind this.
ADAMLE: Everybody remembers the theme song—*dun-dah-dah-dun-dan-dad-DAH! dah-dah-dah-DAAAHHH!*
FERRARO: I had always loved Bill Conti, who scored the *Rocky* films.
BILL CONTI, theme composer: So they ask me to do the music. I'm working stream of consciousness, putting in as much noisy brass as I think will make someone want to stand up and punch someone across the river. I send some stuff to the studio. Then I call, "Did you guys get it?" They say, "Yeah, we loved it—but we've got the paramedics here. . . ." I mean, every time I called back about another piece of music it was, "Well, this guy just fell off this thing. . . ." I'm like, Oh my God, I gotta check this thing out.

FROM MANURE TO MSG

GEMINI: That first season was really barbaric; we got busted up like you wouldn't believe. The contenders were smaller than us, but a lot of them were cops, firefighters, ex-Marines—tough guys with tough spirits. They would film one show a day . . .
ADAMLE: . . . but *we*—the broadcasters, the gladiators—would do two or three shows in one day. We'd shoot

SPHERE AND LOATHING

In games like Atlasphere (top) and Powerball, full-timers had a ball going after contestants, who sometimes found that crossing the wrong gladiator could mean extra punishment.

two seasons in a three-month span.
GEMINI: Everything we did involved falling from a great height, 30 times or more. You're banging your back, your shoulders, your elbows, your knees. . . . The injuries started mounting up. We needed more gladiators.
SHA-RI (BLAZE) PENDLETON-MITCHELL, gladiator: I was fresh out of college at Nebraska. I ran track and was training for the 1988 Olympics when I strained my hamstring. While I was rehabbing, someone approached me about trying out for the show. I had never heard of it. Then I told my family. They had seen the pilot; they went crazy.
SHANNON (DALLAS) HALL, gladiator: I was living in Dallas, bodybuilding and stripping. I was a real wild child. On a dare, I entered a regional tryout to be a contestant. Everybody was super serious while I was really drunk and a little high. When they called back and asked if I wanted to be a gladiator, I was like, I guess the stripping's gotta go on hold.
JIM (LASER) STARR, gladiator: Nitro and I met at Rams training camp in 1987 and quickly became inseparable. One year after he made *Gladiators,* they had another tryout and I made it. I wound up lasting seven seasons and doing more episodes [127] than any other gladiator. The work was crazy.
GEMINI: Eventually I told the producers we needed an athletic trainer on set. They let me bring in Tony Spino, who was the trainer at UCLA when I played football there.
BLAZE: One time I rolled my ankle playing Breakthrough and Conquer [a combination of wrestling and short-field football]. My foot was so swollen, I thought I was gonna be out for a week. But Tony healed it in a day. The guy worked miracles. He had to. We couldn't afford to miss time.
LASER: In the seven years I did the show, I had 11 surgeries. Most of them were for shoulder injuries. If you were hurt on that first day of taping, boy, you had to suck it up—buckle your chinstrap and go. The show didn't pay a ton of money [$12,000 total for the first 13-episode season, plus 400% in residuals], but still: If you missed an episode, you were gonna lose out.
DALLAS: They did have insurance. If you got hurt, they did fix you. You just didn't get paid while you were out.
LASER: To survive, we iced. We took painkillers.
NITRO: Season three, I herniated disks in my back. After putting me through a battery of tests, the doctor said, "You're out for four to six weeks." I was looking at losing out on hundreds of thousands of dollars. I asked an exec what I needed to do to get back on the field. She said the only way was to get the doctor to sign off. I took a handful of Vicodin, went back to the doctor and passed every test she put me through. That season, painkillers and I were good friends. A gladiator has to eat.

"I took a handful of Vicodin," says Nitro. "That season, painkillers and I were good friends.
A GLADIATOR HAS TO EAT."

LASER: I don't think any of us gladiators had a sense of where the show was going to take us.
FERRARO: Very quickly, it took on a life of its own.
GEMINI: Colleges really bought into it. They started having knock-off gladiator competitions on campuses, especially on the East Coast. They tried to get us to come out to them.
FERRARO: I went to Goldwyn and said, "We gotta do a tour, take the show on the road." They fought me tooth and nail, so I started putting it together without them. We announced the whole tour at Madison Square Garden.
GEMINI: I couldn't believe how many cameras were there. I look over at Johnny; he looks back and winks—like, *I told you so.* It was so surreal, going from manure to Madison Square Garden.

BETTER THAN THE OLYMPICS

FERRARO: That tour [from 1991 to '92] was pretty gruesome. We did 114 cities.
BLAZE: That was the best.
LASER: Some of the most fun I've ever had.
GEMINI: We'd start in Maine and work our way across the country.
LASER: It lasted nine months, but none of us were ever traveling for that long. We'd go for three or four weeks, fly home, visit our families, then join back up with whoever was out there. They would hold tryouts two

BLAZE 1989 to '92
If you live in the Bellflower, Calif., area and have a child in grades K–12, there's a chance that substitute teacher Sha-Ri Pendleton-Mitchell turns up in their classroom. After the final bell the 53-year-old coaches the track team at St. John Bosco High.

NO FUN, ALL GAMES
Gladiators' competitions included (from left) Hang Tough and the iconic giant-Q-tip game of Joust.

weeks before an event to have contestants ready. It was a magnificent feat, taking all that equipment and all those people on the road.

GEMINI: We hit every big venue: MSG, Chicago Stadium. . . . If a leg was more than 275 miles, we flew. If it was under, we were on Whitney Houston's tour bus, which was gorgeous. Every single place we went was a sellout. We would run into MC Hammer at different venues. . . . His crew is breaking down, you're setting up; you're breaking down, they're setting up. Then we went to Europe.

FERRARO: When we had that tour, that's when everything went through the roof.

MALIBU: I booked a regular spot on a studio stunt show, Conan the Adventurer, at Universal. I was running back and forth between shows. It was a magical time.

LASER: Once a season ended, you could take the rest of the year and work other screen jobs or do gladiator appearances. A lot of us did trade shows, made extra money signing autographs. For two years I became a celebrity endorser for a supplement company.

GEMINI: I made a heckuva lot of money doing that stuff.

NITRO: I remember having lunch at a Hollywood restaurant. Steve Martin approaches my table, introduces himself and tells me he's a huge fan. Then he brings me over to his table and introduces me to Dustin Hoffman and his wife. The s--- was crazy. One night I was invited to a party at the home of the late billionaire Marvin Davis. Tony Bennett is the entertainment, Cristal is flowing. I'm introduced to former presidents Ford and Carter. As I'm leaving, Merv Griffin tells me there's someone he wants me to meet. It's Ronald Reagan.

MALIBU: WWF had been killing everything in syndication, and then this little show came along and started slaughtering them.

BLAZE: No, I didn't get to realize my dream of representing my country in the Olympics. But, hey, I got the *Gladiators*! I was still wearing red white and blue, and in my eyes it was better than the Olympics. I ended up getting more recognition than my friends who qualified for the '88 Games.

GEMINI: At the same time, they didn't want us to become *too* big. It was always, We want the show to be the star.

GEMINI 1989 to '92
A physical fitness consultant in L.A., Michael Horton, 62, spends his fall Sundays watching the youngest of his three children, Wes, play D-end for the Panthers. (Wes, 26, can't remember his visits to the *Gladiators* set as a toddler.)

LASER 1989 to '96
A former VP of product development for companies like 24-Hour Fitness and Apex, Jim Starr, 54, now serves in a similar role for LifeTime Fitness, a Minnesota-based chain of high-end gyms.

MIKE ADAMLE 1989 to '96
A mainstay at NBC 5 Chicago, where he's the sports director and an anchor, Adamle, 66, still works out like a fiend and confesses to sometimes singing the *Gladiators* theme song in the shower.

JOHN FERRARO 1982 to present
At 63, the *Gladiators* creator doesn't impersonate Elvis nearly as often as he did back in the 1990s, but he's determined these days to revive the franchise and make it everlasting.

NITRO: We took the competition very seriously, but everything else was kinda like the Wild West. We were a bunch of athletes, drunk on fame, fueled by youth.
DALLAS: We were all sleeping around. Who wouldn't be at that time? S---, if that door opens, you'd better walk through it! Some of the gladiators slept with each other. There were no major relationships or babies. It was just, You're good-looking, I'm good-looking—let's get together!
FERRARO: I remember going down to Texas, walking down the street. I'm leading, and behind me are the gladiators. People are looking and pointing. Then they start closing in around us, challenging us. *Well, you don't look so tough*—that kind of thing. Next thing you know, it's like, Guys, we gotta go. People saw the gladiators and wanted to test them.
MALIBU: We had to stay together. We had to fight together.

"Some of the gladiators slept with each other," says Dallas. "It was just, You're good-looking, I'm good-looking—
LET'S GET TOGETHER!"

YOU DON'T MESS WITH US

THEISMANN: I felt like I had an intrinsic appreciation for the *Gladiators* concept because I had competed in ABC's *Superstars*, a sports competition featuring star athletes from various arenas—trust me, it was big in the '70s. I really got into *Gladiators*; I had some input in some of the events.
ADAMLE: Joe would go to sleep, come in the next day and say, "Hey, guys, how about this?" There was no such thing as a bad idea. Everybody got to contribute.
THEISMANN: I ran through the competitions to get a better sense of what the challengers were going through. I did research into their athletic backgrounds. I wanted to be able to tell their stories.
MALIBU: We soon realized, these contestants coming onto the show are not playing—they're out to kick butt. We're not gonna just dance around in our star-spangled underwear and look great.
DALLAS: Once you were in character, you had to *bring it*. You had to earn the respect and trust of your fellow gladiators.
MALIBU: That's when you saw a team dynamic among the gladiators. It was us against them.
BLAZE: The scary part is, we never really rehearsed. At most we'd do a walkthrough to familiarize ourselves with new events. Meanwhile, the contestants got to practice. They were coached by Marines. The first season, they brought up two drill sergeants from San Diego; me and this one sergeant, we couldn't stand each other. The second season, I asked him for some tips on getting better in Joust [essentially, an elevated pugil-stick battle]. Third season, I went down to San Diego and trained with him on base. Long story short, I end up marrying the guy, Rodney Mitchell. Twenty-five years later, we're still together!
MALIBU: I got a concussion on the first day I filmed, and I needed plastic surgery on my forehead. I had to beg my doctors to let me go back on the show. Later, I'm wrestling a guy in Breakthrough and Conquer. I point to my stitches and tell him, "Please, just don't kick me in my forehead." The second the bell rings, he smacks me right in my stitches. The other gladiators say, "Next event is Powerball [where contestants attempt to deposit balls into cylinders while gladiators oppose them]; Malibu, you drag him off-camera." Sure enough, I get him off-camera and pound the snot out of him. He comes back on-camera and his uniform is disheveled, his face is red and his hair is tweaked. That was the quintessential you-don't-mess-with-us moment. That guy's name? Billy Wirth; he was in *The Lost Boys*. Great movie.
LASER: As the show got bigger, they brought in celebrities, pro football players, Olympic athletes to be contestants.
NANCY LIEBERMAN, contestant and Hall of Fame basketball player: The producers called me and said, "We understand you won the all-female *Superstars*," which is kinda how I made a living coming out of college. "We'd like for you to come do *Gladiators*." The top prize was $10,000. I'm thinking, I'm gonna go over there and kill it. Danny Manning had been on the show too. Serious jocks.
DANNY MANNING, contestant and former NBA forward: I had a lot of friends that were involved in the show, like Sabre [Red Williams]. That was a unique experience, but not something I go around talking about a lot.
LIEBERMAN: We get one day of practice. They introduce us to the gladiators and I go over to one of the girls, touch her biceps. I say, "You're stronger than my husband," and she just glares at me. They didn't know

THE COMPLETE ALI

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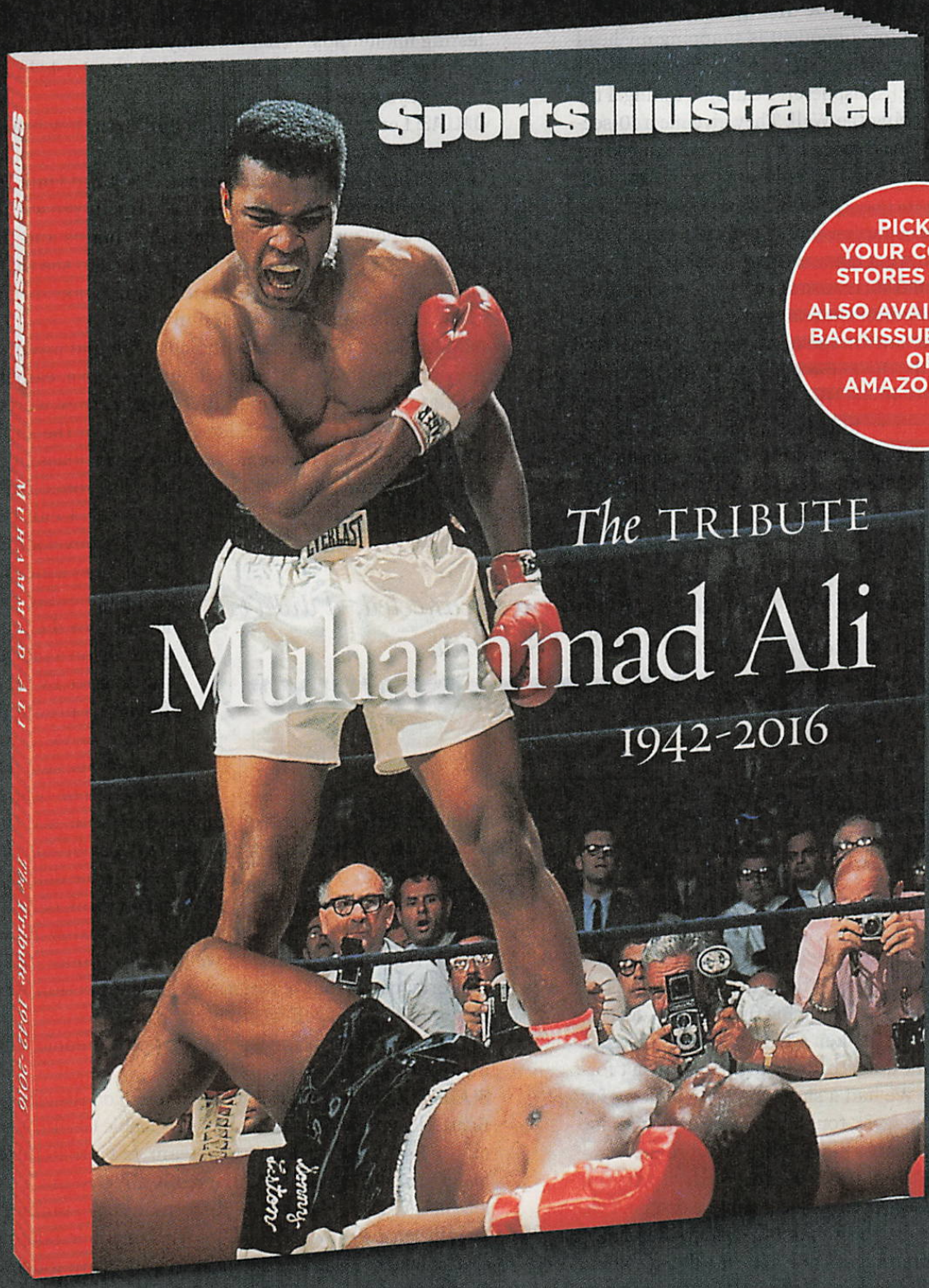

With 144 pages of stories and photos from SI

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my sarcasm. I'm like, "This Q-tip thing [Joust] can't be that hard." Next thing I know, my opponent is snapping my head backward. . . . O.K., can I try the gerbil-cage thing [Atlasphere]? I can't get rolling. I try climbing the Wall. They give me a 10-second head start, but I'm halfway up when I feel a hand grab me and rip me off. This is *practice*. The show was a disaster. I was one of the first eliminated; I took my $3,000 and went home with my health.

MANNING: It wasn't in my wheelhouse either. They didn't have any events where I could take advantage of running. Even in Assault, the game where they shoot tennis balls at you, the barriers were too small for me to hide behind. Watching on TV, you think, I can do that. Then you get out there and realize, This isn't for me.

"We all raised a glass when the new show was canceled; it didn't deserve to be on the air," says Adamle. "So, yeah,

WE'RE PISSED OFF, COLLECTIVELY."

NOBODY WANTS TO SEE THAT S---

FERRARO: You know what's funny: I was talking to a guy the other day and he says, "*Gladiators* was always such a good, clean show. . . ."

NITRO: I first tried 'roids in 1981. No one had heard of them. I thought they must be safe because I was getting them from a doctor.

FERRARO: When *Gladiators* first started, I think that stuff was legal. And don't forget: We had a show that was looking for the biggest, toughest guys. Some of those guys, most likely, were on steroids.

NITRO: A Rolls-Royce pulls up to the *Gladiators* sound stage in season one. Lyle Alzado, the superstar Raiders defensive lineman, gets out. He was dating Lace. Later that night we go to his restaurant in Hollywood, Alzado's. I ask Lyle about his steroid use and he gives me this long list of s--- he's taking. I couldn't believe what he was telling me—"Go big or go home."

FERRARO: We're on tour in 1991, having a meeting. One of Goldwyn's guys is there and he says, "On today's agenda, we're going to start testing for steroids." That's when you start seeing some of the guys drop weight. When they brought *Gladiators* back, in 2008, trust me, those guys were tested.

DALLAS: Let me say something about that. They brought that show back and changed *everything*.

LASER: They made it too Hollywood. They had Hulk Hogan hosting, which I thought was a joke. Our show, unlike pro wrestling, was real.

DALLAS: They made the gladiators the villains and the challengers the heroes. Come on, man. Nobody wants to see that s---.

LASER: It pissed me off. They didn't want to take direction from any of the ex-gladiators or even Johnny Ferraro.

ADAMLE: They didn't want anybody who had anything to do with the previous show—directors, lighting people, camera people. The gladiators all of a sudden didn't matter; they weren't allowed to speak. They completely missed the point of the show—and that's why it only lasted one year. We all raised a glass; it didn't deserve to be on the air. So, yeah, we're pissed off, collectively.

FERRARO: I can't let the brand die. I'm developing an *American Gladiators* fitness chain. Hopefully some day we'll do sports leagues. In the meantime, we're working on a movie and developing another TV reboot with Mark Burnett's production company. Understand: Networks don't want to spend a lot of money.

ADAMLE: The original show died right before the birth of Netscape and the Internet. Imagine what it would've been like if Laser had his own blog, if *American Gladiators* had its own web site. It would've been off the charts.

MALIBU: When you think of the '90s, you think of *American Gladiators*. We were kinda the beginning of the reality shows.

LASER: Years and years later, we have this bond—the kind of thing you only get through athletics, that connection where you get a different sense of self-worth and caring.

DALLAS: I've never been around a group of people who cared about me like that.

BLAZE: The last few years have been tough on the group. Siren [Shelly Beattie] committed suicide; Storm [Debbie Clark], who followed me on the Nebraska track and field team, fell into homelessness. Nitro had a heart attack in 2014; that really affected me. That's my buddy.

ADAMLE: We lost Hawk [Lee Reherman] last summer [at 49, of unknown causes]. Most of us went to his funeral in Southern California, on the beach. That was sad. But we all stay in touch.

FERRARO: We're inseparable. The gladiators, they're basically my children. That show changed our lives.

NITRO: I unearthed the spandex the other day and put on my singlet—yes, it still fits after 20 years—as a gag for a workout I lead at my CrossFit gym. It felt better than it should have. Like home. □

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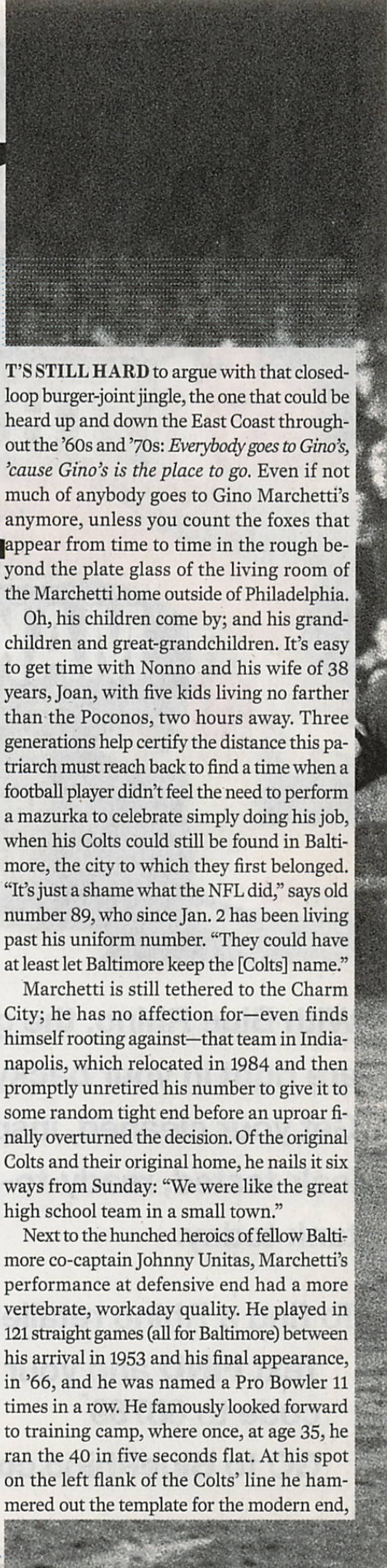
WATN

He had the meat to compete with the giants of any era. . . . Oh, and this oft-overlooked Baltimore Colts legend was also one of the most dominant defensive ends ever to put on the pads and helmet

GINO MARCHETTI

By **ALEXANDER WOLFF**

Photograph by
HY PESKIN

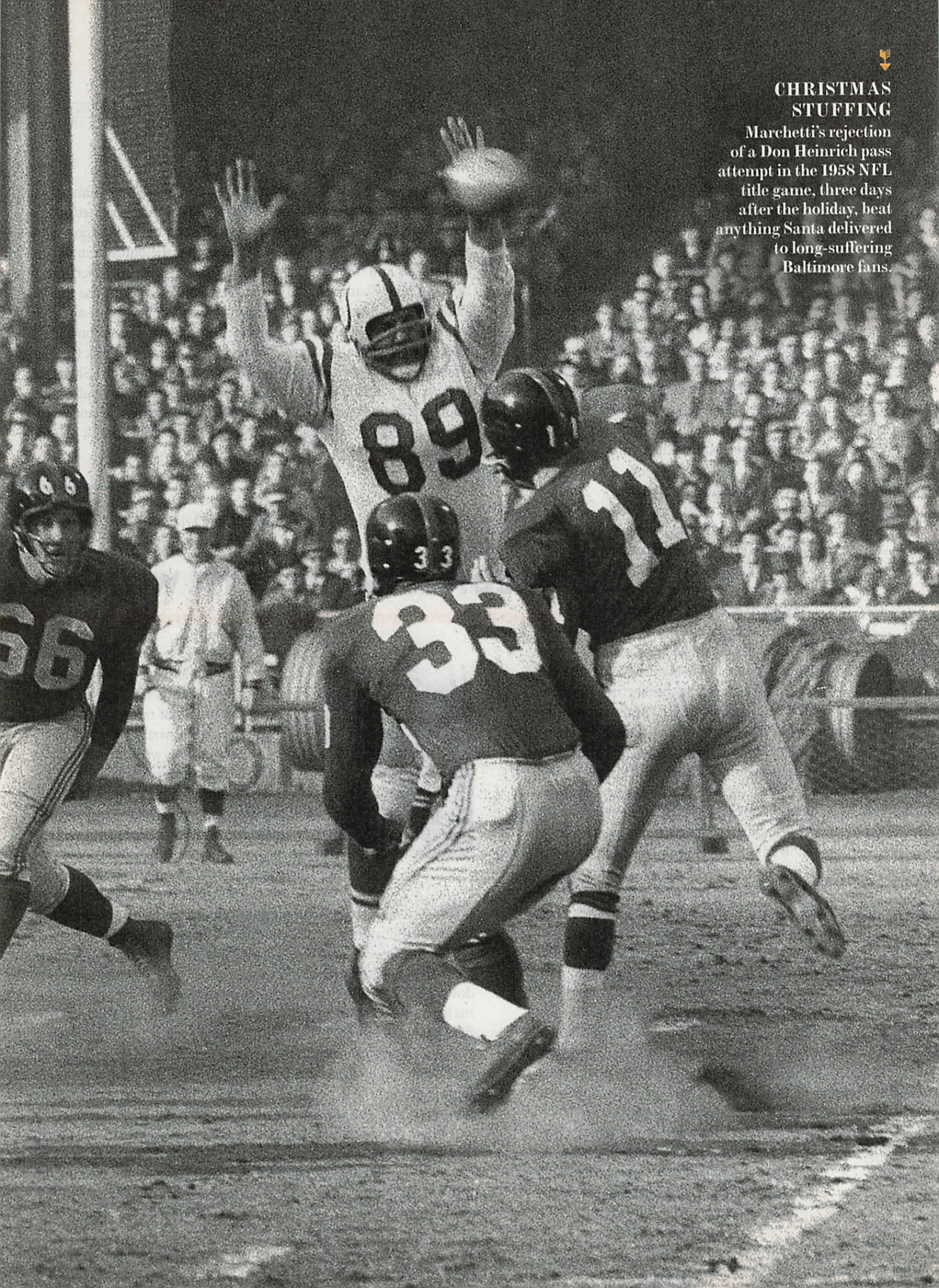


IT'S STILL HARD to argue with that closed-loop burger-joint jingle, the one that could be heard up and down the East Coast throughout the '60s and '70s: *Everybody goes to Gino's, 'cause Gino's is the place to go.* Even if not much of anybody goes to Gino Marchetti's anymore, unless you count the foxes that appear from time to time in the rough beyond the plate glass of the living room of the Marchetti home outside of Philadelphia.

Oh, his children come by; and his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. It's easy to get time with Nonno and his wife of 38 years, Joan, with five kids living no farther than the Poconos, two hours away. Three generations help certify the distance this patriarch must reach back to find a time when a football player didn't feel the need to perform a mazurka to celebrate simply doing his job, when his Colts could still be found in Baltimore, the city to which they first belonged. "It's just a shame what the NFL did," says old number 89, who since Jan. 2 has been living past his uniform number. "They could have at least let Baltimore keep the [Colts] name."

Marchetti is still tethered to the Charm City; he has no affection for—even finds himself rooting against—that team in Indianapolis, which relocated in 1984 and then promptly unretired his number to give it to some random tight end before an uproar finally overturned the decision. Of the original Colts and their original home, he nails it six ways from Sunday: "We were like the great high school team in a small town."

Next to the hunched heroics of fellow Baltimore co-captain Johnny Unitas, Marchetti's performance at defensive end had a more vertebrate, workaday quality. He played in 121 straight games (all for Baltimore) between his arrival in 1953 and his final appearance, in '66, and he was named a Pro Bowler 11 times in a row. He famously looked forward to training camp, where once, at age 35, he ran the 40 in five seconds flat. At his spot on the left flank of the Colts' line he hammered out the template for the modern end,



CHRISTMAS STUFFING
Marchetti's rejection of a Don Heinrich pass attempt in the 1958 NFL title game, three days after the holiday, beat anything Santa delivered to long-suffering Baltimore fans.

that blend of size, quickness and agility that would be embodied in Deacon Jones and then Reggie White and then J.J. Watt, the player who can dart laterally to catch a ballcarrier and sprint forward to collect the sacks that today lend the position its glamour. At weigh-ins he would slip lead into his jockstrap because coaches back then believed a lineman should be heavy; Marchetti, who rarely played above 240, knew better. In his day the NFL hadn't yet enshrined the sack as a statistic, but Baltimore's staff, going through game film at the end of one season, credited him with 43.

For a man so identified with his sport, Marchetti bracketed that career with two consummate male experiences apart from football. Before the NFL, before playing on a legendary team at the University of San Francisco, he served in World War II, an 18-year-old infantryman in the Fighting 69th, lugging a machine gun along the Siegfried Line into the Battle of the Bulge. "The first time I saw snow, I slept in it," he says. Then, after retirement, he built up and sold the hamburger chain that made him a wealthy man.

Today, still able to summon most of the 6' 4" inches at which he played, the old Colt stands as a witness, his speech a little slowed but his memory as stark and durable as the white marble of a row house stoop. He's the guy who, when he learned in 1962 of Carroll Rosenbloom's plans to make a coaching change, urged the Colts' owner to hire a Lions assistant and former teammate named Don Shula. Marchetti was in Hershey, Pa., the night Wilt scored 100, there to take part in an undercard exhibition that was a Colts-Eagles basketball game—though by the time Chamberlain set the record, Marchetti and his teammates had long since drifted off to hoist beers in some veterans' hall. In the locker room one day he heard someone wonder aloud when injured first-stringer George Shaw might be back and articulated what others had only just begun to sense: "It doesn't matter. Unitas is the quarterback now."

In fact, Marchetti was as much notary as witness—the man whom NFL commissioner Pete Rozelle (USF's publicist during Marchetti's time with the Dons) would recommend to anyone who wanted to know what players were thinking. Oddly, something that the public remembers well stands as a rare feat that Marchetti *failed* to see out: overtime of the 1958 NFL Championship Game between the Colts and the Giants. With three minutes to play in the fourth quarter, facing third-and-four from its own 40, New York had a chance to run out the clock on a 17–14 lead. The Giants called a sweep around right end for Frank Gifford, who chose to cut back over tackle, if only to avoid Marchetti. Shedding a block, Marchetti lunged back at Gifford and struck him waist-high. Marchetti wound up beneath Gifford, at which point his bookend on the Colts' line, Eugene (Big Daddy) Lipscomb, threw another 284 pounds

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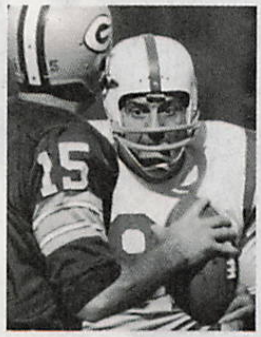
CREDITED MARCHETTI WITH 43.



on top of the pile. The impact broke two bones above Marchetti's right ankle.

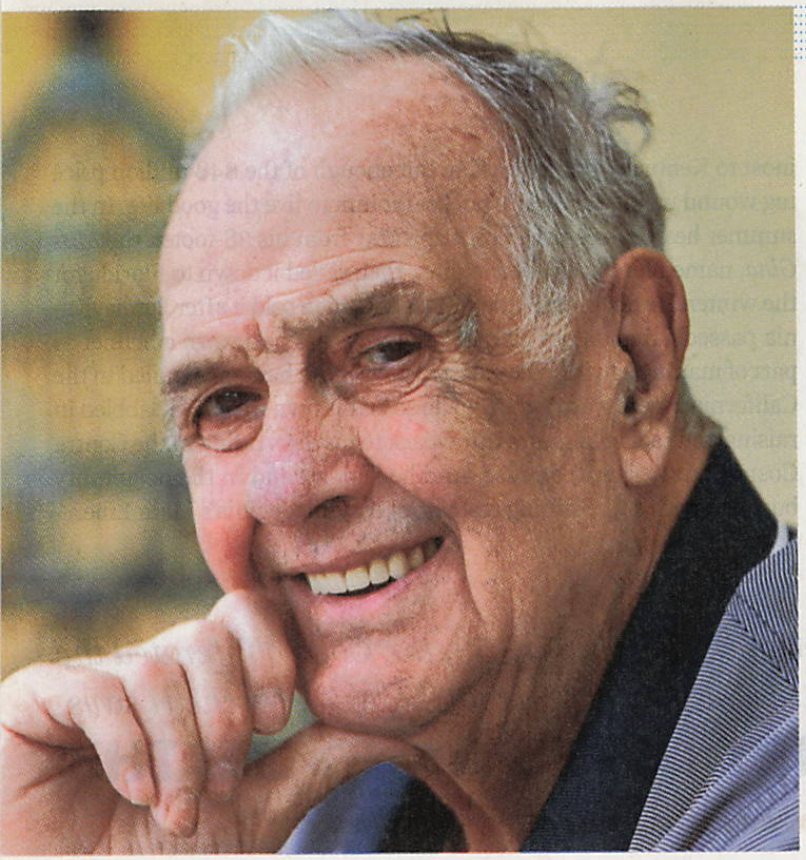
In the annals of taking one for the team, few people would absorb so much in the service of so worthwhile a result. The linesman spotted the ball one foot short of a first down, forcing the Giants to punt. And while Gifford has insisted over the years that he picked up that conversion—that Marchetti's screams of pain distracted the official into an errant placement—a 2008 ESPN documentary, using forensic mapping techniques on old film, determined the Colts did indeed stop Gifford short, by nine inches.

It took six men to stretcher Marchetti off the turf. His litter-bearers wanted to take him to the locker room, but he ordered them to set him down behind the end zone. Picked up and put down every few plays, his leg wrapped in ice, Marchetti watched as Unitas led a drive for the field goal that forced the first sudden-death period in NFL history.

By the second series of what would be eight-plus extra minutes, Marchetti finally agreed to be taken from the field, capitulating to fears that he could get trampled by the crowd and that the plunging temperatures would send his body into shock. Not until the first teammate burst through the doors of the locker room did Marchetti, stomach-up on a training table, learn that fullback Alan Ameche had scored in the gloaming to win for the Colts the game that launched the NFL into the modern, Madison Avenue–driven age.

Marchetti has followed the NFL's evolution since then and under-

WALTER IOOSS JR.



WORKHORSE
Marchetti (above and opposite, closing in on Bart Starr) was one of five Colts named to the NFL's alltime team in 1994.

stands the changes, even if he doesn't endorse every one. "They want to keep the QB healthy, no matter the cost to the defensive player," he says. He pities today's D-linemen, who he thinks aren't likely to get the benefit of a referee's doubt. "You're going full-speed, and a 300-pound tackle is knocking you around," says Marchetti, who claims to have never been assessed a 15-yard penalty during his career, "but people come to see the quarterback, and if the quarterback goes, the draw isn't there."

In the aftermath of the 1958 title game, surgeons operated twice to repair Marchetti's leg, and the injury had no bearing on the rest of his career. But it turns out that doctors missed a bone fragment. It migrated down as far as it could and, over the years, ground away to form a callus on the ball of his foot. "Every step I took, the thicker it'd get," he says. "And being in charge of all those restaurants—I really worked it."

Only within the last year did he submit to one more operation, which has brought some relief. A moment for the Colts, a moment for the NFL, delivered a chronic reminder for most of the rest of Gino Marchetti's life.

POVERTY CHASED Ernest and Maria Marchetti from the hills of Tuscany to those outside of Charleston, W.Va., where Gino's father worked in the coal mines through the Depression. When Gino was young, the family left for Antioch, Calif., an industrial town east of San Francisco, where Ernest opened the Nevada Club, a place to find food and drink and legal backroom poker.

Ernest had become a U.S. citizen, but with the outbreak of World War II it suddenly mattered that Maria hadn't. Never mind that her eldest son, Lino, served in the U.S. Army and that Gino would soon enlist as part of a deal with an antagonistic teacher that allowed him to collect a high school diploma. With Maria exiled from Antioch for fear that she might commit sabotage or espionage on behalf of Mussolini, the family relocated to an apartment just outside of town. "Did they think she'd blow up the fiberboard plant or something?" her son posits now. "Every day we'd come home and she'd be crying, saying things like, 'Look how I've made you live.' "

After the war Gino spent one season at Modesto Junior College, then returned to Antioch, where he worked the counter at Lino's bar. Gino wore a leather jacket, his hair long and tucked behind the ears, with a motorcycle to boot. But football had wormed its way into his blood, so he and a buddy organized a semipro team, the Antioch Hornets. When a recruiter from USF walked into Lino's bar and asked where he could find Gino Marchetti, Gino said, "That's me," and quickly snubbed out his cigarette.

The Dons who went 9–0 in 1951 included eight players who would go on to the NFL, two of them African-Americans—Ollie Matson and Burl Toler. In a team meeting at the end of that season, Marchetti and another white player, Bob St. Clair, presided over the unanimous decision to reject a bid from the Orange Bowl that was contingent on USF's leaving its black players home. In the team photo of those Dons—the Undefeated, Untied and Uninvited, as they were proverbially known—Marchetti sits beaming at the center, a human bonding agent, with Matson (who was enshrined in the Pro Football Hall of Fame on the same day as Marchetti, in '72) to one side and Toler (later the NFL's first black referee) to the other. After one game, while out with Toler and a couple of white teammates, Marchetti fumed at a bar owner who turned them away. "Right there, I told Burl how my mother had been kicked out of town," Marchetti explained to Unitas biographer Tom Callahan. "For a minute, I considered roughing up that bar."

Like all NFL players of his era, Marchetti had to work during the off-season. At first he'd drift back to Antioch, herding cattle or tending bar for Lino; later he'd stick

AL TIELEMANS

around Baltimore, setting duckpins at a bowling alley ("two cents a line") or working in the iron mill out on Sparrows Point ("buttholing"—shinnying along beams in a straddle position). Like any "Bawlmer Merlin" workingman, at quitting time he'd repair to a tavern for a Natty Boh. All of which enriched his understanding of how, with a second NFL title in 1959, the Colts obliterated the inferiority complex of "Smalltimore," the city that hadn't won anything of relevance since the Orioles of Wee Willie Keeler, back in another century. "They loved us to death," Marchetti says. "And we loved them back."

Rosenbloom knew this, and several weeks before the 1958 title game he summoned Marchetti. *You have a name and a following*, the owner told him. It made sense to live in Baltimore year-round and go into business. And Rosenbloom wanted to help.

The following April, Ameche-Gino Foods Inc., opened its first Gino's restaurant, staked in part by a portion of Marchetti's $4,674 championship share. Marchetti's teammate already operated Ameche's Drive-Ins, with a menu featuring a 55-cent Ameche's Powerhouse hamburger. Aware of a booming chain out west called McDonald's, Ameche wanted to introduce 15-cent burgers, but he needed another name to avoid undercutting the pricier Powerhouse. Gino's provided a fresh brand for a trending concept.

True to his word, Rosenbloom vouched for a 10-year, $100,000 lease at an early Gino's location that wound up generating $15,000 a week and ignited the business. Marchetti felt so indebted that he twice came out of retirement at Rosenbloom's request. By the time he left the Colts for good, in 1966, Gino's counted 65 outlets, making it the largest chain of company-owned-and-operated restaurants in the East. The ride lasted into the late '70s, when the company suffered from overambitious expansion in a soft economy.

At the time of its sale to Marriott International, in 1982, Gino's owned 313 restaurants. Marriott converted 180 of them to Roy Rogers stores; the rest were closed or sold off, most to Kentucky Fried Chicken. But enough of the $48 million price tag wound up in Marchetti's pocket for him to live the good life. In the summer he deep-sea fished off Cape May from his 38-footer, the *Miss Gina*, named for his oldest daughter, then sailed it down to Florida for the winter. He bought a Harley-Davidson, then sold it after Pennsylvania passed a mandatory helmet law. (For years he'd worn a helmet as part of making a living; the old hard guy whose hair once trailed in the California breeze wasn't going to do so on his own time.) He dabbled in raising and racing horses, a throwback to his days riding in the Contra Costa County sheriff's posse. And he kept a hand in the hospitality business with a fine-dining restaurant on Philadelphia's Main Line.

With a second NFL title in '59, the Colts obliterated the inferiority complex of "Smalltimore." Marchetti says,
"THEY LOVED US TO DEATH."

At one point Marchetti ballooned to 330 pounds—"I ate and drank my way through the state of Pennsylvania," he says—and in 1981 he needed three stents to be inserted following a heart attack. But a regimen of walking helped him drop 85 pounds, and he has kept most of the weight off. "The dog," he says, nodding at Cinder, a poodle-schnauzer mix, "I've got to walk him."

He has slaked his competitiveness in fishing tournaments and bowling leagues, where in 2005 he finished one final-frame 5-pin short of a perfect game. And in 1978 he helped the Colts beat the Giants once more, in a made-for-TV touch football reunion in Central Park.

He still has his stories and the lucidity to do them justice. Details are pegs on which to hang each tale: the red Chevy, parked outside the Marchetti family home, that enticed Gino and his younger brother, Angelo, to fatefully meet a visiting coach from Modesto, who really wanted Angelo but *hey-what-the-hell* told Gino to come along to campus too. The 1958 championship-game ball, wrested from a cop by center Buzz Nutter and awarded to Gino, who protested, "But I didn't even finish the game." The bottle of bourbon, hidden beneath the coat of Clark Gable, whom the Colts once ran into at the Los Angeles airport while out to play the Rams; a photo, now hanging in the Marchettis' den, was taken moments before the Hollywood star dropped that bottle, shattering it on the floor.

Of the five Colts posing with Gable—Marchetti, Unitas, Ameche, Bill Pellington and Carl Taseff—everyone but Marchetti is now dead. "My wife tells me, 'Gino, you were blessed,' " he says. "Even going into the Army, the G.I. Bill sent me to Modesto. Modesto didn't really want me, yet I was the one who wound up staying, not my brother. After that, USF. And then Carroll, begging me to move to Baltimore. . . .

"Those things all just *happened*. I could say I planned it, but I didn't. I was just a dumb guy standing there saying yes."

THERE'S THE GRUB
Marchetti (working the kitchen in 1964), ate up QBs in season and served up Gino's Giants in the summer.

IT'S HARD to imagine a patch of Maryland that makes more sense as the staging ground for a Gino's-brand comeback than the town of Glen Burnie. Much of the housing stock, built for veterans returning from World War II, has remained in families for generations. No fewer than four bowling alleys still operate within a 15-mile radius. And the Gino's Burgers and Chicken now on Ritchie Highway occupies the sceptered spot where an original Gino's once stood—the very outlet where Marchetti used to swing by and pick up chicken before heading out for a day on Chesapeake Bay. "When we were building here, people driving by would honk their horns and yell, 'You better have the Gino's Giant!' " says Karen Foreman, the franchisee who opened the restaurant in September 2012, referring to Marchetti's version of the Big Mac. "It's so emotional for people. Not a day goes by without somebody telling me their Gino's story."

When Rosenbloom's successor, Robert Irsay, took his team away in the middle of a snowy night in 1984, it hurt in the way that it hurts when a scab is ripped off—but the next morning the team was gone, and at least the healing could begin. But Gino's left torturously over a decade, from the company's sale in '82 to the shuttering of the last outlet, in Pasadena, Md., in '91. Many Marylanders conflate the team of their youth with the food they grew up on, and the departure of Gino's compounded the pain. Says Tom Romano, an executive with the original Gino's who has brought the brand back to life (here and in Towson, Md., so far): "When Gino shows up at a Gino's, it feels like mom's making you soup."

On this hazy Saturday in May at the Glen Burnie Gino's, the Great Eponym himself is on site. People start lining up at noon for a 2 p.m. meet-and-greet. Marchetti devours a Gino's Giant, then takes a seat under a tent, where fans offer thanks—"for when it was a game, not a business" . . . "for your [military] service" . . . "for the memories." One fan has even lugged in a cinder block from an original Gino's building, with the distinct red-blue-and-white tiles intact on one face. Marchetti signs it.

For nearly three hours they come uninterrupted, never fewer than 50 in line at a time. Marchetti signs a seat back salvaged from the Colts' old home, Memorial Stadium. He signs an envelope adorned with a stamp commemorating the Battle of the Bulge. He signs Gino's ashtrays and Gino's stock certificates and an old 45 rpm record pressed with Chuck Thompson's radio call of what would come to be known as the Game That Made the Game. He signs booster badges commemorating the day he retired—they were sold, at 50 cents a pop, to surprise Marchetti by flying his dad to Baltimore, where Ernest had never before seen Gino play the sport that Ernest never wanted his son to play because he rightly feared that Gino would get hurt. Gino signs creased black-and-whites of himself posing with fans, pictures brought by the very people in the frame, 10 or 20 years his junior, now into their 80s and 70s. Adorers and hero alike congratulate one another on how well they've held up.

Greater Baltimore has emptied its attic and laid the contents at the feet of a man who treasures every artifact as much as its owner does. "They never talk to me about the Ravens, I'll tell you that," he says.

When only a few lingerers remain, Marchetti pulls his head up and beams, and he begins to croak out that old tautological tune: "*Everybody goes to Gino's*"—and here people join in—" *'cause Gino's is the place to go.*"

Then, to no one in particular; smile even broader; now witness, notary and bailiff; big guy to the end: "You better go, or you'll get the hell kicked out of you!" □

WATN

After he starred in the feel-good Hollywood movie The Air Up There, *it seemed as if life would imitate art for the Kenyan hoops prospect. Instead, things took a darker, messier turn*

CHARLES GITONGA MAINA

By **GREG GROGGEL**

Photograph by
GREG GROGGEL
INSET: BUENA VISTA PICTURES/PHOTOFEST

IT'S SIX MILES from Jomo Kenyatta International Airport to the Nairobi neighborhood of Buruburu, but the drive, in a city with only a couple of working stoplights for 3.9 million residents, can take several hours. This leaves plenty of time for my driver to ask why I've traveled halfway around the world for only a weekend. It's a good question.

I first tried to track down Charles Gitonga Maina, Kevin Bacon's costar in the 1994 film *The Air Up There*, two years ago when I was the coordinating producer of the short-lived Fox Sports 1 show *Crowd Goes Wild*. We'd had success bringing on former stars of much-beloved (if critically pilloried) sports films from the '90s, when the form was at the height of its popularity. The surprising success of *A League of Their Own*, *The Mighty Ducks* and *Cool Runnings* had made it easy for studios to green-light variations on the theme. Lost in that mix was this basketball film of questionable substance. Bacon played Jimmy Dolan, a college assistant coach who, in a stroke of drunken inspiration, heads to a distant African village to land his next big recruit: the 6' 9" Saleh, played by Maina, who himself had been discovered in Nairobi by a foreign scout. Art imitated life, so to speak.

For all its faults, and there are many, *The Air Up There* exudes a certain charm. Maina, who was a 19-year-old novice actor when the film was shot, was almost unanimously praised for his portrayal of Saleh, a tribal prince. Critics called him "warmly appealing" and "hugely engaging."

Six months after *The Air Up There* was released, Nigeria-born Hakeem Olajuwon led the Houston Rockets to the first of two straight NBA titles. Like many who came of age in that era, I was enamored with the NBA's

TRUE STORY
Maina received glowing reviews for his performance in *The Air Up There* and for his college play, but a hoped-for professional hoops career didn't pan out.

international turn, and Maina personified that fascination. I couldn't shake his story.

Maina seemed to have vanished. My intel on his whereabouts consisted of a single Facebook post. After years of my badgering friends with experience working in sub-Saharan Africa, my sister, through a contact, returned with a solitary clue: "The guy can be found at the Buruburu shopping center." I was told to check the bars first.

My plan was as simple as it was ill-conceived: Enter a bar in the shopping center, see if there were any 6' 9" patrons, and if not, move on to the next one.

Buruburu is a middle-class enclave on the outskirts of Nairobi. Its bars and cafés are popular weekend destinations where one can waste the hours away in a sea of local lager and English Premier League matches. Maina was born and raised here, the third of four children of a telecommunications auditor and a nurse. He learned to play basketball at age 14. In 1991, when he was 17, he won the Nairobi slam dunk championship, and a year later he was chosen from among 46 other players at an open casting call for the part of Saleh. Director Paul Michael Glaser has said Maina won the role in part by boasting, during his taped audition, "I'm a dunkaholic."

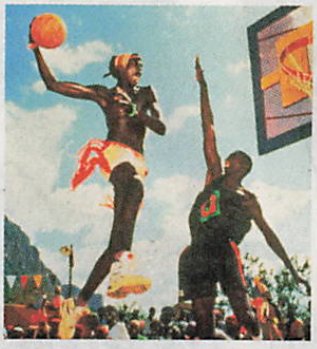
The driver and I approach the patio of our first bar, the Winds Club. No, the waiter doesn't know any former actors or basketball players. Once our beers arrive, a middle-aged gentleman who has been watching us from a nearby stool calls over in Swahili, *"Ninamjua yule mrefu?"* ("I know him, the tall guy?") The man introduces himself as Benson Kivati, the local police chief, and sends a nearby teenager off in pursuit of the tall guy. It can't possibly be this easy.

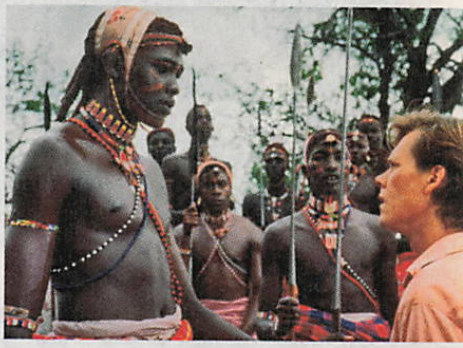
Less than 10 minutes later, in this city bigger than Chicago, Charles Gitonga Maina ambles into the bar. I awkwardly shake his hand and try to explain why I've come. We're both overwhelmed. "Boy, do I have a story for you," he says, his speech slightly slurred.

We agree to meet the following morning. Before Maina departs, Benson pulls him aside and whispers something into his ear. Later I ask what he said. Benson replies, "I told him to arrive sober."

WHEN WE MEET the next morning, Maina is wearing a knitted beanie pulled low over his ears, no matter that the temperature is in the 80s. When he finally takes it off, a receding hairline and a frosting of gray better reveal his 42 years.

We start from the beginning. He tells me that when he traveled to Los Angeles for the final audition for the movie, it was the first time he'd left Kenya. Once he won the part, it was off to Hoedspruit, South Africa, where most of the filming took place.





BLOCKED OUT
After demonstrating his skills on the set (above and right, with Bacon), Maina played college ball in the U.S., but a trip to Greece for a pro tryout meant the end of his stay Stateside.

Excluding Bacon, who needed a stunt double for some of his scenes, the production included a veritable who's who of hoops. The film's technical adviser was former NBA MVP Bob McAdoo. Ilo Mutombo (Dikembe's older brother) played Maina's on-court adversary. Nigel Miguel, a former UCLA standout who had appeared in *White Men Can't Jump*, played Maina's older brother.

At 19, Maina was the youngest of the group, and his potential was obvious. "I thought he had a chance to play college basketball in America," says McAdoo, now a scout for the Heat. "Just seeing his enthusiasm and his size, I knew there was something there."

The movie had only modest success at the box office, but to many who saw it, it was oddly memorable. According to Miguel, former stars such as Allen Iverson and Michael Jordan have mentioned the film over the years, but it's Shaquille O'Neal, playing to type, who liked to quote some of the more memorable lines ("I play for Winabi!").

Once the frenzy of the promotional tour subsided, Maina stayed in the States to pursue college opportunities. McAdoo, who was letting Maina stay with his family, called Jeff Price, head coach of Lynn University in Boca Raton, Fla., and asked him to take a look at a very raw but promising prospect. The result was a scholarship at the D-II level. This time, life imitated art.

Maina flourished. He was the starting center and a key contributor for a team that made the NCAA D-II Sweet 16 during the 1997–98 season. "His timing and ability to block shots was as good as any

kid I've coached," says Price. Yet throughout Maina's two seasons in Boca, the shadow of Saleh loomed large. The local press couldn't believe its good fortune. (Sample lead: "The real life story of Charles Gitonga Maina may end up a sequel to the movie.")

After his two years of eligibility were up, Maina considered his options. Acting had offered few opportunities since his leading role. Instead Maina looked into a pro basketball career in Europe. McAdoo urged him not to go: If Maina didn't make a team, he could easily have visa problems and find it hard to get back into the U.S. But Maina had routinely defied the odds. Playing in Europe was the obvious next step.

Following the advice of his sports agent, he traveled to Greece for a tryout with a pro team. It did not go well, and Maina declines to tell me the details. Afterward he was denied reentry to the U.S. and forced to return to Kenya. It was the last time his American friends, coaches and teammates heard from him.

"What was it like after coming back? Lot of friends, you know how it goes. . . . You're young, and you **DON'T KNOW HOW TO SAY NO."**

"WHAT WAS it like after coming back?" Maina asks, anticipating my next question. "Lot of friends, you know how it goes. You're young and suddenly you have money. You don't know how to say no."

Maina, now living at hone with his parents, is a constant presence in the small Bermuda Triangle of bars in Buruburu. He tends to speak in contradictions. He says he freelances in foreign-currency-exchange markets from a nearby Internet café, but he hasn't checked his email or social media accounts in years and doesn't have a cellphone. He helps coach young kids from the neighborhood, but he doesn't own a basketball. In 2003 he spent three weeks in the hospital with a broken jaw after a mugging in which he was stabbed and hit in the head with a stone; a few years later he contracted tuberculosis. "I've been struggling with depression, I can't deny it," he says. "You expect your life to be here, you go downhill, you come back up, it continues."

His neighbors are unsure of what to make of their once-famous son. "People have the conception that if you go to the States, Wow, you're going to make it," he tells me. "Little did I know, life is the same everywhere, but with a different angle." At the end of each of these admissions Maina is careful to follow up with a platitude. *No regrets. Bounced back. Life is good.* He's just as charming as he was in the film.

I ask one last question: Can he still dunk? Maina lights up and offers to show me. We make plans to meet the following day on a nearby court. I'll find a ball; he'll bring his game.

THE AIR UP THERE culminates in perfect 1990s feel-good movie fashion. Saleh, newly introduced as the starting center of St. Joseph's University, walks off the court with Jimmy Dolan, who is promoted thanks to his unorthodox recruiting methods. They laugh, the music swells ("Higher and Higher"), and the final frame is a slow-motion high five. It's so cheesy that it's endearing. And it's not unlike what I have in mind while I wait for Maina on the court.

He is late, leaving me plenty of time to play out the coming scene in my head. He'll dunk, of course; it will be a cathartic slam. We'll laugh, music will swell, and Maina will realize that good times lie ahead.

After waiting a half hour, I head back toward the town center. I decide to check a bar, Doc's Pub, that Maina had pointed out the day before. At the far end is the unmistakable 6' 9" shape of Charles Maina, head lowered, cradling a pint.

I ask where he's been. He turns slowly and takes a few moments to recognize me. "I was there," he says, his voice rising. He staggers to his feet and leans in close. "I was there," he repeats, louder, more aggressive.

"I'm sorry if there was a misunderstanding," I say. His wiry frame relaxes, and he puts his arm around me.

"Do you pray? . . . I try to, in the mornings," he says, before losing his thought. I wait for him to continue, but he's done talking. I tell him I have to leave, and he gives me a hug and wishes me well. Outside, embarrassed by my own naiveté and guilty of the same latent paternalism as the film's protagonist, I arrange a ride to the airport.

It's hard not to get swept up in the current of a feel-good narrative. We crave stories of redemption and of success against incredible odds. But the true story of Charles Gitonga Maina isn't a Hollywood-ready tale, just a complicated life.

"Have I learned my lesson?" Maina wondered the day before. "I find it very hard to trust a human being. You give yourself, and they squeeze you out." □

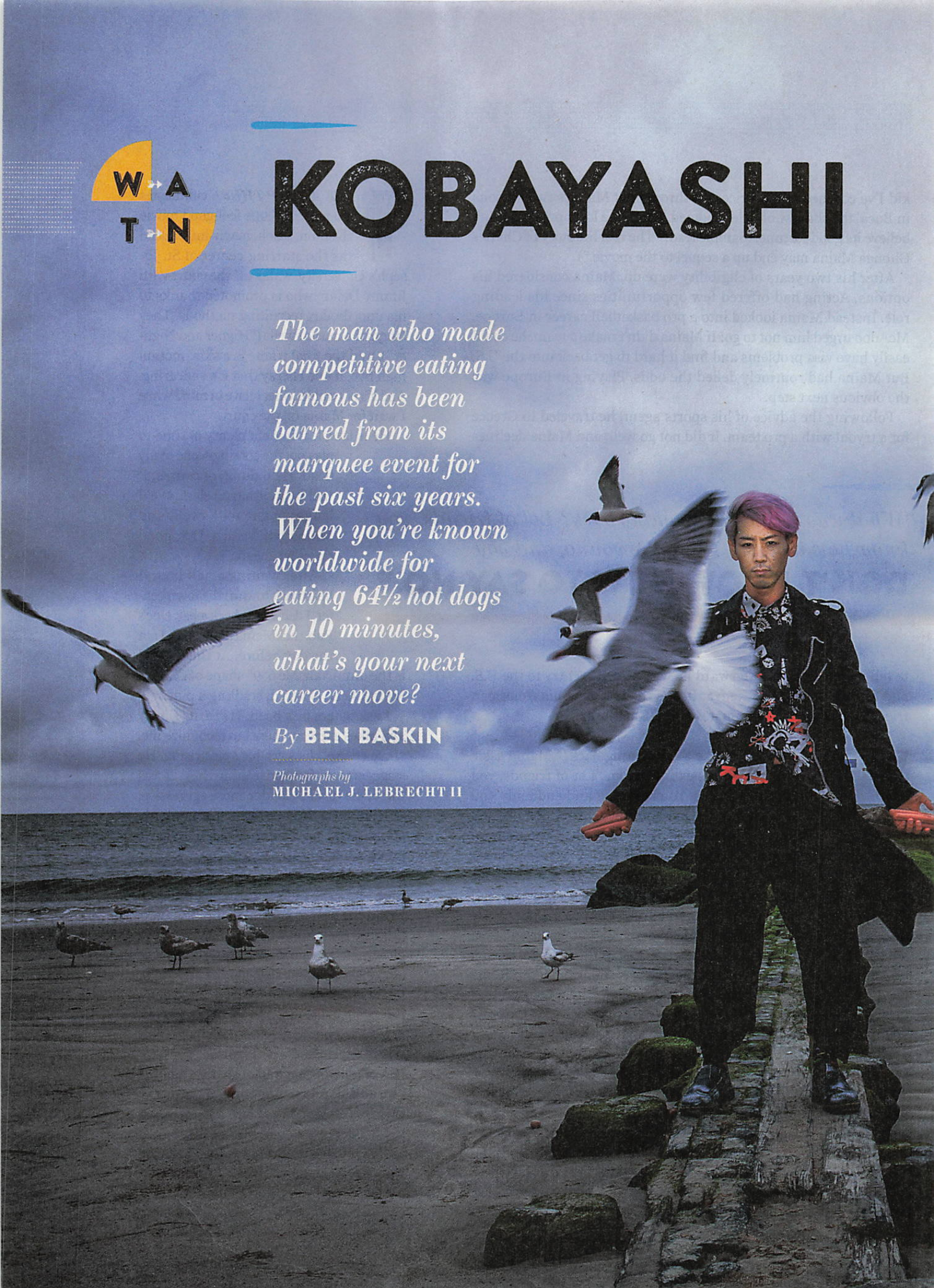
WATN

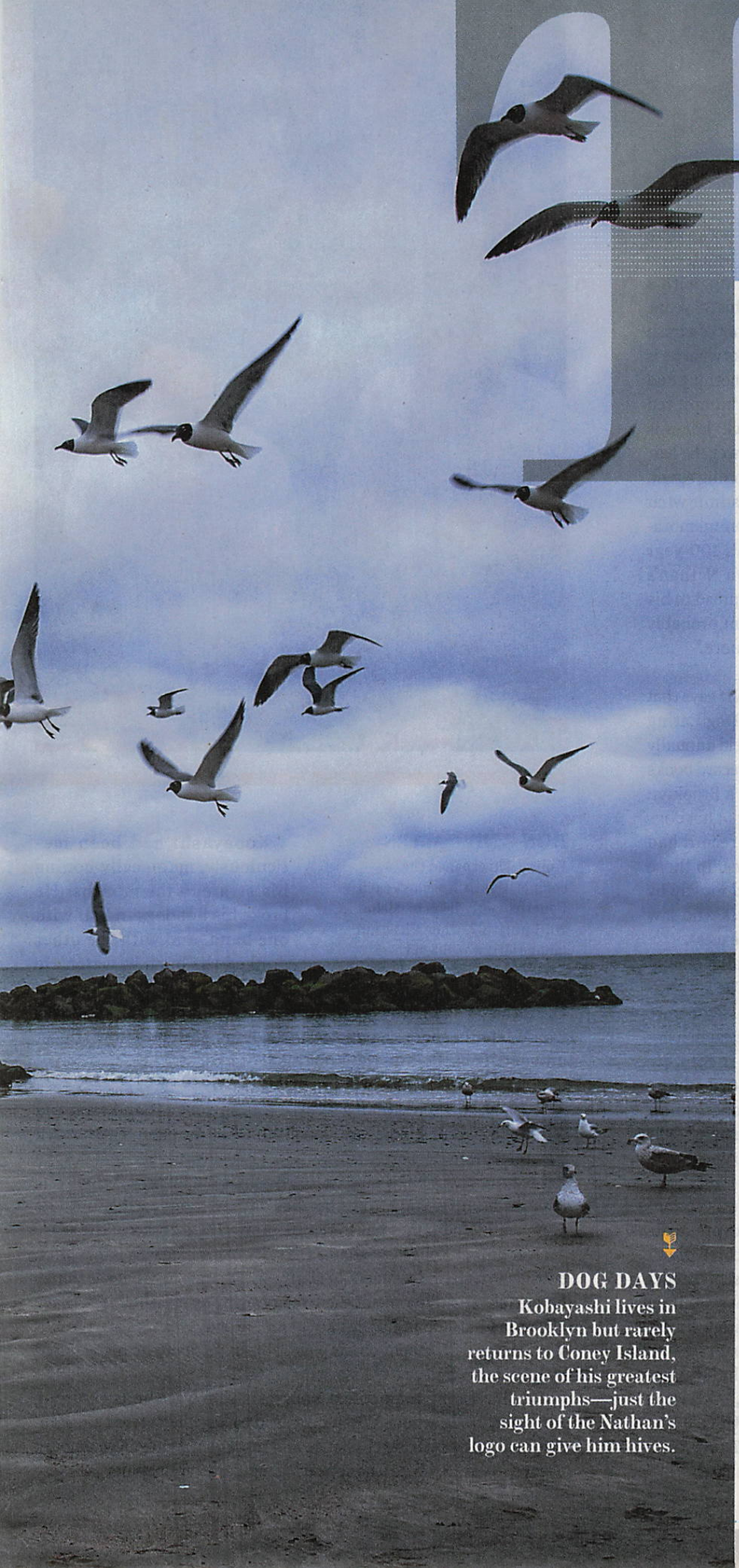
KOBAYASHI

The man who made competitive eating famous has been barred from its marquee event for the past six years. When you're known worldwide for eating 64½ hot dogs in 10 minutes, what's your next career move?

By **BEN BASKIN**

Photographs by
MICHAEL J. LEBRECHT II





DOG DAYS
Kobayashi lives in Brooklyn but rarely returns to Coney Island, the scene of his greatest triumphs—just the sight of the Nathan's logo can give him hives.

HERE ARE 61 days, one hour and 35 minutes showing on the Nathan's Wall of Fame countdown clock when Takeru Kobayashi returns to Coney Island for his first extended visit since 2010—the first since he was handcuffed and dragged off the same stage where he once reigned. Under clouded skies, the red-white-and-blue Nathan's billboard towers over low-rise buildings, pretzel stands, diners and arcades, displaying a digital countdown to the next Fourth of July hot dog eating contest and the faces of every competitive-eating legend: Crazy Legs Conti, Eater X, The Black Widow. All of them except Kobayashi, who was unceremoniously effaced from the collage in '11.

On a cold morning in May, Kobayashi reluctantly agrees to return to the neighborhood and face his demons, with the stipulation that he will not go near the Nathan's storefront. The boardwalk is sparsely populated. Most of the storefronts are boarded up, all of the rides shut down.

Kobayashi arrives with his manager-translator-stylist-girlfriend, Maggie James. He is wearing a long black trench coat over a black-and-white shirt, black drop-crotch pants and metallic-buckle shoes. His hair is pink. His socks are decorated with brightly colored dinosaurs.

Before his photo shoot, Kobayashi sits on a bench and James drapes a towel over his shoulders. She applies lotion to his face and neck, touches up his cheeks with makeup, sprays product in his hair. Kobayashi talks about what's changed since he broke off from Nathan's and Major League Eating, the world's largest governing body of competitive consumption, in 2010.

"The way they run things is imperialistic," he says of MLE. "I feel like I have left that small world behind. Like it was a different lifetime."

Eventually Kobayashi is ready. He walks up and down the boardwalk, posing, smiling; he's at peace in his old haunt. He climbs atop a metal railing, raising both arms over

his head as he takes in the hazy ocean view. He chases pigeons down the beach even after the camera stops clicking, with a childlike innocence that belies his 38 years.

Then, abruptly, he stops in front of a trash can and stares inside. James asks what he is looking at, but Kobayashi says nothing and walks away. Within minutes, bumpy, red splotches break out on his neck. James is confounded—she checks the towel, the hair spray, the lotion for some offending agent.

Only later will Kobayashi admit what he saw in that trash can: a commemorative cup celebrating Nathan's 100-year anniversary. "I think I have a Nathan's allergy," he says as the hives spread to his arms and legs. "It means I am probably not supposed to be here anymore."

COMPANY LEGEND says that the Nathan's Hot Dog Eating Contest has been held annually since 1916, but the record books go back only to '72. That year a Brooklyn College student won by eating 14 hot dogs in 3½ minutes. By 2000 the record had stretched to 25⅛ in 12 minutes. In those days the event was populated mostly by portly New Yorkers, dilettantes who saw it as a one-day excursion into excess.

Then in 2001, Kobayashi—all 5' 7" and 131 pounds of him—arrived. The 23-year-old flew over from Japan the day before the event, having never before eaten a hot dog, and finished 25 of them in 5:13. He didn't stop until he reached 50, doubling the previous record. "If you want to know the history of competitive eating," says David O'Karma, an eater who consumed 17 hot dogs that year, "it starts right then."

Kobayashi's performance was so outlandish that the numbered placards flashed to show the eaters' scores didn't reach digits high enough; the scorekeeper had to start writing Kobayashi's totals on pieces of paper. Some competitors simply put their hot dogs down and stared.

"It was a mesmerizing inhalation of food, a ballet of gurgitation," O'Karma says. "It was like I had seen a UFO. It was like *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. Nothing was the same after that."

BUN AND GAMES
Kobayashi crushed the competition at Nathan's each Fourth of July from his debut in 2001 until '07, when Chestnut (above left) won 66–63.

Kobayashi had been meticulously, maniacally honing his strategy for months. He broke his hot dogs in half with one hand, and with the other dunked the buns in water. He then gyrated his entire body as he funneled them down his throat. This combination of moves would later become known as the Solomon Method—now almost universally used—and the Kobayashi Shake.

IT'S BEEN more than a week since his Coney Island visit, and Kobayashi and James are having dinner on the patio of a Brooklyn restaurant. His hives subsided just two days earlier, and despite eating only a bagel all day, Kobayashi is not hungry. Actually he is never hungry. Sometimes he goes days without eating, until he seems faint and James has to remind him. "He is broken," she says.

Over dinner Kobayashi shares the story of his life, with James often cutting him off mid-sentence to clarify or elaborate on what she thinks he means. The dynamic of their relationship is inscrutable. "I have always had a woman taking care of me," Kobayashi says after James slices the grilled octopus on his plate. This he attributes to being raised by his mother and two older sisters.

The first eating competition Kobayashi won was a milk chugging contest in grade school. When he was in college, he entered a restaurant's curry-rice-eating challenge and more than tripled the amount needed to win. Soon he was appearing regularly on a popular Japanese

show called *TV Champion*. After dominating the country's nascent competitive-eating circuit for a year, he suggested to the *TV Champion* execs that they should stage a contest in which the winner would be flown out to Coney Island to compete at Nathan's. They agreed, and he won.

In the months before he left for New York City, Kobayashi experimented with different eating methods, videotaping his training sessions and charting and analyzing various techniques—a mad scientist consumed by a most unusual pursuit. Since hot dogs were not readily available in Japan, he was able to practice only with fish sausages.

After six straight years of winning at Nathan's, Kobayashi lost to Joey Chestnut in 2007, 66–63. That competition took place four months after Kobayashi's mother died, and mere weeks after he suffered a serious jaw injury from overtraining that still ails him to this day. But then he lost to Chestnut again in '08. And then again in '09.

The 23-year-old flew over from Japan the day before the event, having never before eaten a hot dog, and

FINISHED 25 OF THEM IN 5:13.

Things became farcically convoluted in 2010. As Kobayashi tells it, when he notified George and Richard Shea, cofounders of MLE, that he was moving to America, they tried to get him to sign their standard contract for U.S. residents. The deal would have barred him from participating in any non-MLE-sanctioned competitions, and precluded him from making appearances in which he did anything related to eating or that conflicted with a Nathan's sponsor.

"They want to control the world," Kobayashi says.

George Shea says that the contract did not materially change from previous years—Kobayashi and James vehemently deny this. They also disagree on how much money was offered, and on virtually every other aspect of how the negotiations fell apart.

"There is a huge conflict of interest based on the fact that they are the governing body of the league and also want to act as your manager," says Patrick Bertoletti, a former No. 2–ranked eater in MLE who split from the league in 2013. "It is kind of bulls---."

Although Kobayashi refused to sign the contract before the 2010 competition, he showed up in the crowd wearing a black T-shirt with FREE KOBI on the front. After the contest was finished, he climbed aboard the stage—holding a backpack full of hot dogs, prepared to hold his own eating exhibition—and was swarmed by police. In a scene alternately described by onlookers as sad and surreal, Kobayashi grasped the blue Nathan's barricades as he was dragged from the platform, ultimately spending the night in jail.

"As great as he was for competitive eating, and as responsible as he was for making it a sport," Chestnut says, "he made it weird again right then."

A **SMALL CROWD** has gathered on a Friday night in March, coiled three deep around the ring, as Kobayashi takes center stage. It's been six years since the arrest, 10 since his last win at Nathan's. But Kobayashi is not here to eat. He is making a pro bono appearance at a charity event at SPiN, a Ping-Pong club in Manhattan, where a $50 donation allows you to spar with pro boxer Boyd Melson.

"We have a very special guest," the emcee for the event bellows. "A *Guinness World Records* titleholder. Fighting out of Japan, by way of Brooklyn. . . ."

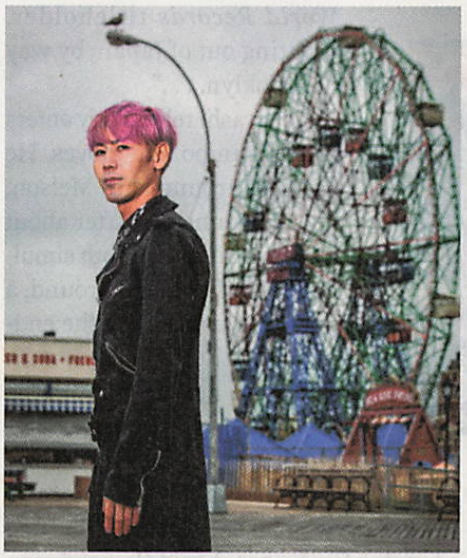
Kobayashi reluctantly enters the ring in boxing gloves. He bounces around with Melson, feigning punches. After about three minutes they both simultaneously fall to the ground, a double knockout à la the ending of *Rocky II*.

For the next few hours the notoriously shy Kobayashi retreats to the outskirts of the club. Fans approach intermittently. One woman tells him that she had a hot dog for dinner. A middle-aged man begins to pat Kobayashi's stomach; he obliges by undulating it in and out. Mostly Kobayashi just nods and smiles. At one point he reveals a pair of long white socks, replete with images of hot dogs. Near the end of the evening a man in his early 20s approaches. "Oh, man, I used to watch you on ESPN when I was growing up," he says. "You're one of the few athletes we know by just one name: Jordan, Kobe, Kobayashi.

"So, what have you been doing?"

KOBAYASHI GETS animated when talking about his current and future endeavors. He rarely eats competitively anymore, maybe three or four events a year. Yet he is far from retired. Every year since the arrest he has held his own Fourth of July hot dog eating competition. In 2011 he ate 69 hot dogs on the rooftop of a Manhattan club, while a large projector screen behind him simultaneously displayed the Nathan's competition. Kobayashi claimed a world record. Shea called it "a farce."

In a scene alternately described as sad and surreal, Kobayashi grasped the blue Nathan's barricades as he was **DRAGGED FROM THE PLATFORM.**



Kobayashi staged similar one-man competitions in both 2012 and '13. In '14 he switched it up and ate 113 bunless hot dogs, and last year he broke the record for most hot dogs eaten while playing Ping-Pong (35). The most challenging part of being an independent eater, he says, is organizing these events: securing sponsors, attracting an audience.

He says he earns most of his money from appearance fees. In recent years he has traveled to Singapore, Taiwan, China, Brazil, Turkey, Indonesia, Puerto Rico and Italy. In the U.S., most of these are small events, ranging from eating pizza at some bros' Super Bowl party, to cupcakes at a self-storage facility, to hot dogs versus a hamster eating miniature hot dogs. Yet Kobayashi says that he's happier than ever, eating better than ever and making more money than ever.

In April he returned to Japan to film a reunion show with all of the old Japanese competitive eaters. Kobayashi, the only one who has not retired, won. Earlier in the year he traveled to the small island country of Palau as a personal guest of president Tommy Remengesau. Kobayashi plans to return in October to help with his re-election campaign.

"It is so clear that our opportunities would have been slayed if we had signed with [MLE]," James says. "There is no comparison with what we would have lost."

Kobayashi did not know what he would do this Fourth of July after the plans for what James calls a "big event" in Chicago fell apart. James says they did not have enough time to put together a major competition, but because "Kobi is so known for hot dogs, he has to do something." So on short notice they set up an eating demonstration at the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

WURST CASE
Kobayashi has considered starting his own line of hot dogs and opening a hot dog restaurant.

What they are both most excited for, however, is what they talk least about. James says that Kobayashi is "kind of in the process" of opening his own hot dog restaurant. She is cagey when discussing these plans but says they should be able to share more soon.

"Competitive eaters don't want to do eating contests for the rest of their lives; it's not sustainable or healthy," Bertoletti says. "Kobi is looking for that exit strategy." It has so far proved elusive; twice in the last five years Kobayashi had tried and failed to create his own line of hot dogs. Even now he sheepishly admits that "opening a restaurant is a lot more difficult than I thought."

"I think his whole life is being a competitive eater," Chestnut says. "I feel for him."

Every year the Shea brothers approach Kobayashi with hopes of getting him to come back; even George concedes that he still "has such a star quality." Kobayashi won't rule out returning to the Nathan's stage, but only if he can sign a one-day contract with MLE. He also says that his desire to defeat Chestnut has subsided after his former rival fell to Matt Stonie last summer, ending his eight-year winning streak.

"I wanted to beat him before he lost his peak," Kobayashi says.

Which then raises the obvious question: Who is the best competitive eater in the world right now?

"I am," Kobayashi says. "Of course."

What about of all time?

"Of course, I am." □

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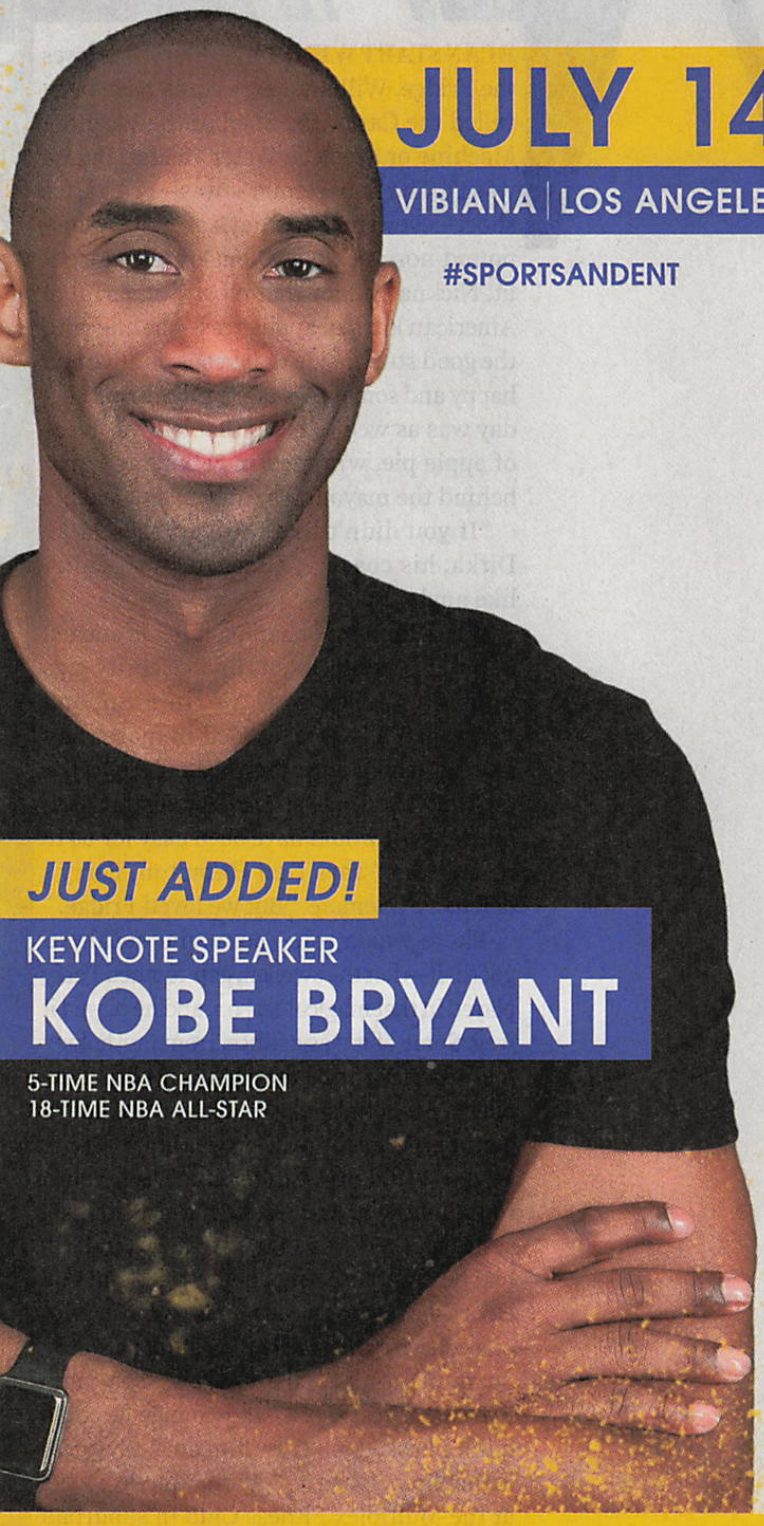

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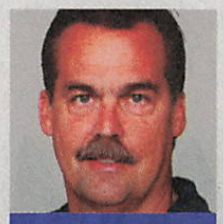

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W

At the turn of the century he was the grinning, trowel-wielding cover subject of SI's inaugural Where Are They Now? issue. Today, the Fridge is not the picture of happiness or stability, as an old friend discovered

WILLIAM PERRY

By **RICK TELANDER**

Illustration by
NATHAN FOX

E CAN START WITH THIS: Everybody loves the Fridge. William Perry could have been called the Car or the Shed or the Washing Machine or even the Water Heater. But he wasn't. The Refrigerator it was—Fridge, for short—ever since his days as a 300-plus-pound nosetackle at Clemson. Because it fit. Nicknamed for that most wonderful of American kitchen appliances—the one with the good stuff inside that keeps us alive and happy and sometimes fat—Fridge in his heyday was as well-liked as that leftover piece of apple pie, wrapped in cellophane, just behind the mayonnaise and cold chicken.

"If you didn't like Fridge," says Mike Ditka, his coach in Chicago, "you didn't like anybody."

When the world champion Bears started to pull in endorsements and celebrity gigs following Super Bowl XX, in 1986, and Perry, just a rookie, hauled in more than anyone—more even than Walter Payton or Jim McMahon or even Da Capitalistic Coach himself—"it would have been easy for us to resent him," says Dan Hampton, Perry's defensive linemate. "But we loved Fridge."

There was a role—convivial southern goofball—that the swollen, gap-toothed Perry played in that magical season, and he played it well. Some of it was artifice, from mythology and expectation and the media's need for simplicity. Fat equals jolly, you know. But much of it was Perry, for real. He was as easygoing as you would expect given his Deep South roots, in Aiken, S.C. He did have 11 siblings; seven brothers and four sisters. He, indeed, had his front tooth shot out by a BB gun as a lad. He had drunk a couple cases of beer after one college game. He could eat like a shark, guzzle like a horse, take off like a rabbit, jump like a lion. Yes, at 6' 2"-and-change he could dunk a basketball. I saw him do it. My guess is that he weighed 330 at the time. We were at the Multiplex Fitness Club in suburban Deerfield, Ill., a couple of years after his rookie season, playing pickup ball. The rim survived.

His fame started when Ditka put him

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in to block for Payton and then to tote the rock himself against the defending champion 49ers in Week 6 of that rookie year. San Francisco's coach, Bill Walsh, had used 275-pound guard Guy McIntyre in the backfield the previous season, in an NFC championship game victory over Chicago, and Ditka had remembered.

But Fridge's notoriety really exploded, like a grenade in a tomato patch, when he lined up and ran for a touchdown on Oct. 21, 1985, in a Monday-night game against the Packers. Much of America was watching as he became the heaviest man in NFL history to score off a set play. All the overweight, Barcaloungered, chip-dipping, vicariously living fans across the country were mesmerized and thrilled. *Hot damn!* This was entertainment.

Back then, you have to remember, 308 pounds was a crazy-big deal, like something from a tent show. Fridge was the "best use of fat since the invention of bacon," one sportswriter wrote. But now there are hundreds of players in the NFL Fridge's size or larger. Many high school teams have one or two. Looking back at the video from when Fridge went on *Late Night with David Letterman* in 1985, it is stunning how slim he appears compared with what we're used to seeing on the field these days.

Humor was maintained that night on *Letterman* with some gags about eating, and when Fridge saw 43-inch, 36-pound teenage actor Emmanuel Lewis in the green room, he told a reporter, "Man, last time I was that small was when I was born."

SO WHO could dislike this fellow? As long as he wasn't played for a complete yokel or freak, he could get along with anybody. And as long as you weren't lined up opposite him, then he posed no danger to anyone or anything. As Fridge, 53, says now, "I'm not doing anything bad. That's not in me, not in my family—we weren't raised that way. I do things in a correct way, a respectful way."

But not, alas, in a healthy way. And not—if we're thinking of life as a brief moment to be tended to with diligence and care—in a proper way. Fridge drinks. Too much. That he drinks *at all*, really, is a problem. He has physical and mental issues that demand sobriety. ("I'm sure he's got traces of CTE," says younger brother Michael Dean, himself a former NFL defensive lineman.) In 2011, just 11 years after he flashed his famously imperfect smile for the cheery cover of SPORTS ILLUSTRATED's first Where Are They Now? issue, Fridge declared publicly that he is an alcoholic. He has been to rehab. He's been told by doctors to stop drinking. He's been told by family members.

None of it matters. He's got drinking buddies. Alcohol's his special pal. He's back in slow, sleepy Aiken and, by God, he's doing what he wants to do. Even if it causes pain and divisiveness in his family, as members watch him slowly implode and are at a loss to help him.

This is pretty much what Fridge does every day now: hang out, shoot the breeze and drink.

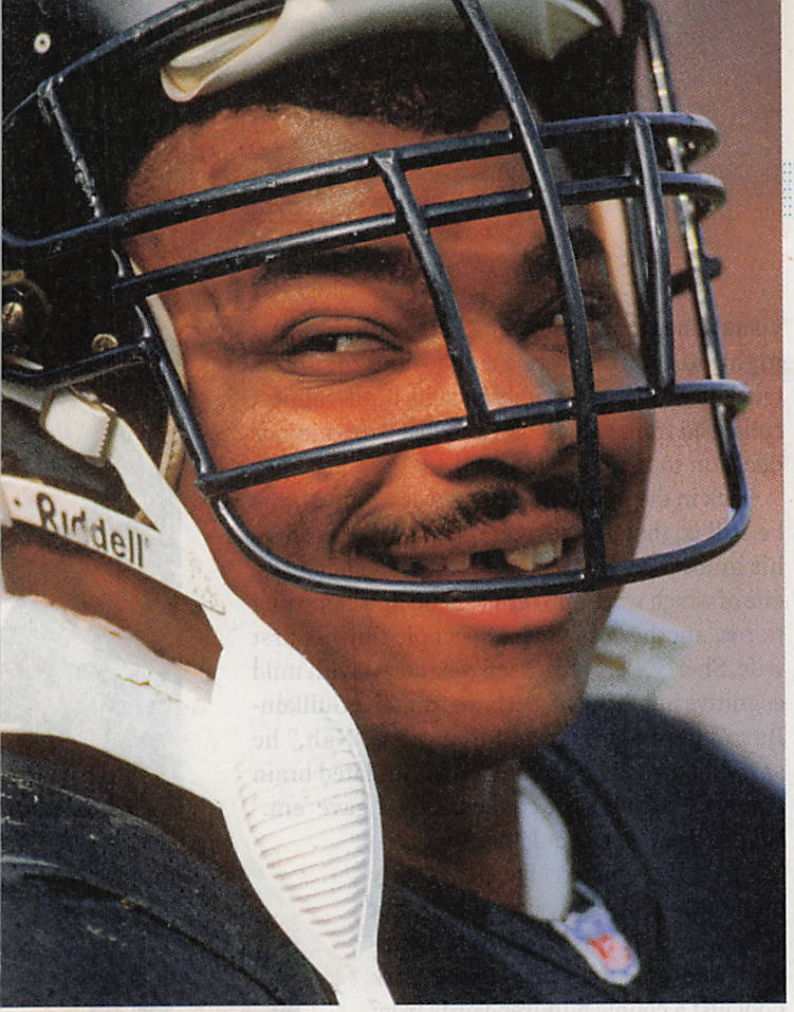
HE'S GOT HIS OWN VODKA CUP.

"I'm home and I'm happy," Fridge says. "I ain't got no plans. I'm just gonna relax and take my time."

So the love and support he receives from others is dead-ended by his stubbornness. Perry can barely walk, and only then with a walker. He's at least 150 pounds overweight—around 430, even 450, according to friends and family. He doesn't work with physical therapists or wear the compression socks or orthopedic shoes that he should. His hearing is terrible, but he won't wear his aids, so he ends up virtually reading lips unless you are close to him and speaking loudly. He has four children, and he doesn't see them much, or at least not as often as one would expect. Both of his ex-wives are out of the picture. He lives alone in a retirement facility.

What does one do? Let him be? He has diabetes and the residual effects of a nasty thing called Guillain-Barré syndrome, which hit him in 2008. Tellingly, one of the concerns with the mosquito-borne Zika virus is that researchers believe it can cause not only birth defects but also Guillain-Barré syndrome, which creates neurological problems that can leave victims paralyzed and sometimes on life support. Its effects can diminish or last forever.

Fridge was nailed by it, possibly because of a severe dental infection, and at one point in 2009 he was near death. He couldn't move and was wasting away in bed, dehydrated beyond recognition, without any family near. Willie, one of his older brothers, says that when he found Fridge, he looked like a gaunt war-camp victim,



MIND THE GAP
Perry's brothers have conflicting ideas about how to help the two-way NFL star with his financial and medical issues.

down to 190 pounds. Look at Perry now, and you might guess that his skeleton alone weighs 190 pounds.

Oh, and the millions of dollars that Perry made over his 10-year NFL career are long gone too. So is his Super Bowl ring—at size 25, believed to be the largest ever made—auctioned off a year ago for $200,000, without Fridge getting anything for it.

It's all a mess, it seems, from health to finances. And sadly, in a sense, the people suffering the most from Fridge's demise are his children (three girls and a boy) and family members, who all claim to want to help him, but who are too busy fighting among themselves to enact any change. Michael Dean, who lives in Charlotte, was named by a judge as guardian and conservator of Fridge's affairs when William was first incapacitated, in 2008. But Perry's son, William II, told a Chicago TV reporter last year that he has doubts about Michael Dean's stewardship and legal control. "It's a bad situation," he said. "Hopefully we can get guardianship over [my dad] and go forward, and get him removed so he can do the right thing and be independent."

Willie is more desperate than that. "Jealousy," he says, is why Michael Dean keeps Fridge under his power. "When William was messed up, it made sense, but not now." Willie claims that Michael Dean, who lives 150 miles away from Fridge, is only giving his brother the "minimum care" that he needs; he suggests that Fridge doesn't see the necessary doctors or attend certain autograph and celebrity outings where he could make much-needed money. This Michael Dean finds hilarious; he says that he was the one who nursed Fridge back to health in 2009, that his sister Patsy is now in Aiken taking care of their brother and that William's own stubbornness explains his missing appointments. He also claims that Willie wants to pry guardianship away so he can use Fridge himself as his "cash cow."

If this makes no sense, so be it. The Perry family is tight but torn, with age difference, gender and competitiveness all leading to a big, interwoven, fractious ball of domestic dysphoria. Willie claims that Michael Dean profits off Fridge's minimal income (from social security and from his NFL pension; public records show Perry with total equity of $35,245 and net income of $13,921 for 2015), pointing to an annual $1,250 "caretaker/conservator" fee in his records. But Michael Dean flat out denies any improprieties; any money, he says, goes toward accounting and bookkeeping. "I'm getting rich off Fridge?!" he asks, incredulous. "I don't want anything to do with the mess! He still owes a couple hundred thousand to the IRS. Everything you put in place, he fights. I can't babysit him for the next 20 years. I've tried to get rid of the guardianship and conservatorship. I'd give it up to anybody—*except Willie*. Anybody but him."

FRIDGE IS in his office—that is, he's in his white Hummer H2, parked in the driveway of a ramshackle house on Ridgewood Lane in Aiken. It's 6 p.m., early April, 72° outside, and 10 or more people hang around the SUV as if it's a tiki hut on a beach. Fridge is tipping back a beer and appears to be a tad inebriated, louder than usual, more demonstrative.

Hanging by the driver's window is a hefty guy in a white T-shirt, smoking a menthol, drinking vodka from a plastic cup. His name is Darrell Epps. Both Willie and Fridge's sometimes manager—a mysterious woman from Aiken who goes by Jaye, whose email begins Perrymediamgt and who occasionally finds Fridge paying gigs—feel that Epps is the worst enabler around. What she wants to tell all these friends is, "You're sitting there watching him die!" Willie says simply of Darrell, "He's William's leech." Again,

fingers point across the divide like daggers. Epps says that Jaye is the real fraud in all of this; "a b----!" Michael Dean, meanwhile, paints Jaye and Willie as trying to make money off it all, "trying to drain [Fridge]."

Despite all the tumult, this is pretty much what Fridge does every day now: hang out with people who lack apparent jobs or places to be, shoot the breeze and drink. He's got his own vodka cup. Maybe it's not that much different from what high-class retirees do at the 19th hole of country clubs, calling it socializing rather than wasting away. The thing is, Fridge can't move from his driver's seat. His car reeks of urine because he sometimes can't control his bladder, sometimes doesn't care. And there's not a medical journal on diabetes or the central nervous system anywhere that recommends alcohol consumption of this frequency for good health.

"I'm his best friend," says Epps, cordially pouring a little vodka for a visitor. "Listen to me. *I'm his best friend!*"

I REMEMBER THE good old days back in Lake Forest, Ill., when the Bears practiced at the original Halas Hall on the east side of town and the Ditka-led circus was the wildest, craziest thing ever to hit the NFL. Before the 1985 Bears went on to outscore their foes 91–10 in the playoffs, before the regular season was even over, half the team filmed an arrogant rap video called *The Super Bowl Shuffle*. Their coach got a DUI on the way home from one game. Their star QB mooned a New Orleans news helicopter on the eve of the Big Game.

And that's not even mentioning the amazing Fridge, who was once penalized for attempting to throw Payton over the goal line. Fridge would sometimes walk over to my house, a block from the training facility, just to see if I wanted to play basketball. Once he sat in my kitchen and watched, mesmerized, as Manute Bol, his physical opposite, played hoops on TV. Who would have guessed that a decade and a half later Perry would box the 7' 7" Dinka Dunker in as absurd a Las Vegas fight as has ever been seen? "What a great visual image!" announcer Chris Rose said that night, not long before Fridge—looking like a truck tire inflated 10 times past its limit—almost collapsed from exhaustion and lost a unanimous decision to the human pencil.

Back in the mid-1980s, Perry was a naïf. Maybe he still is, though the world has taken its toll on his innocence. He has lost several Aiken houses, one of which went into receivership and is starting to rot, another of which is occupied by his first wife, Sherry. Perry has been diagnosed with mild cognitive impairment, perhaps from the Guillain-Barré, perhaps from headbanging. "Nah," he says when I ask him about football-related brain trauma. "I didn't get concussions. I gave 'em." Funny line. Maybe only half-true.

The thing about Fridge is that early on he was a rare physical talent, not simply lard. He was a very good swimmer, a former lifeguard at the park pool just a couple hundred yards from his childhood home. His short-burst running speed was shocking, his basketball jumper deadly, his raw strength unworldly. "On the D-line, all of us—me, Richard Dent, Mike Hartenstine, Steve McMichael—could power clean 370 pounds," says Hampton. "But Fridge just did it like he was picking up a cat. We called it goofy strength."

COOL TO THE END
From his minifridge days at Clemson to his side-by-side-sized stature in Chicago, Perry was always an appliance to be reckoned with.

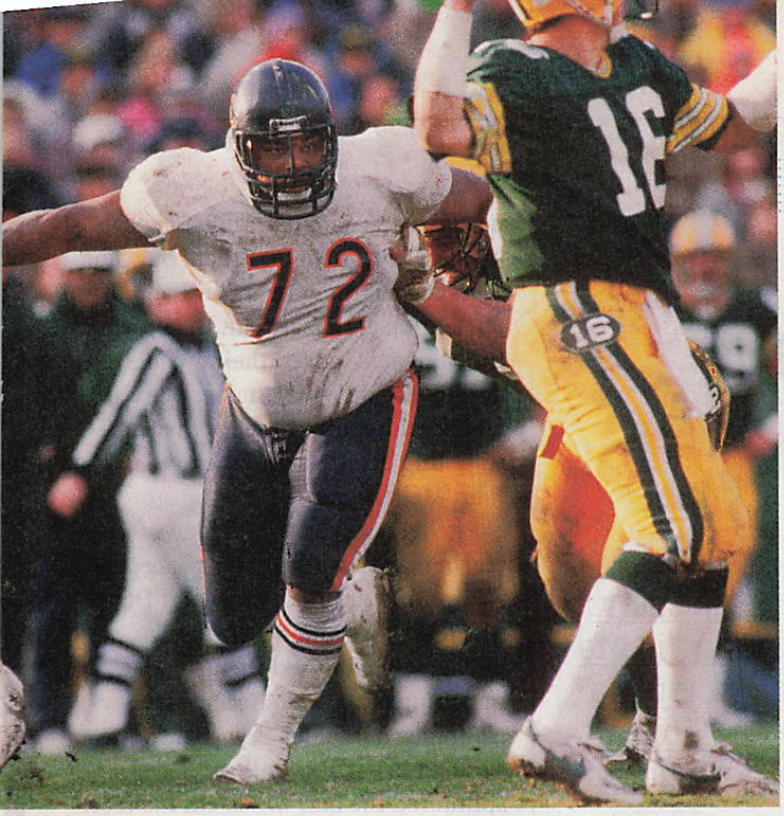
"He was a different individual when I had him, at 308 pounds," says Ditka. "He was a hell of an athlete, with a great attitude. Most of it now has to do with alcohol. You think you're invincible, nothing can hurt you. . . . I know. I've been through it."

The William Perry that I see here in the spring dusk, in his car, doesn't look invincible in the least. He simply looks like a man trying very hard not to think about anything at all.

The following night we meet at an Applebee's. That the actual intersection of Whiskey Road and Easy Street is nearby tells you something about this town that is by parts pretty and decrepit, with Civil War memorials, gas costing $1.37⅘ and a place that's still referred to as the Aiken Colored Cemetery. Nearby, off Willow Run Road, there's a weedy field where a black fellow named Harry McFadden, an acquaintance of Willie Perry's, was reportedly lynched in 1978.

Fridge comes in with Epps, placing his walker next to the table. He doesn't eat much, just nine wings. "Not like the old days," he says. But he has four double Jack Daniels and Cokes, and once he has hobbled back to his car, he asks Epps to go back and get him some pecan pie and a brownie to go.

A couple of months before this I had visited Fridge at Northwestern Memorial Hospital in downtown Chicago. He had come



Fridge's car reeks of urine because he sometimes can't control his bladder,

SOMETIMES DOESN'T CARE.

to town for a 30-year reunion event celebrating Super Bowl XX, with his brother Willie and Jaye escorting him. But after being roundly cheered at halftime of a Bears-Lions game at Soldier Field, he'd become ill with a leg infection related to his diabetes. He told me he could no longer feel from the shin down and that his hands were numb, too.

That night there was talk that he might need to have a foot amputated if things didn't improve. Lying in his bed with a hospital gown on, catheter in place, Fridge didn't frown or complain. He'll never say he's hurting. Former Bears trainer Brian McCaskey remembers when Perry came to the sideline during a game, held his forearm out and said, "What do you think?" "It was bent down and up," recalls McCaskey, amazed, "broken all the way through."

The doctor comes in. He says that for some reason Perry has been taking pills he wasn't prescribed; meanwhile, he's *not* taking the ones he *should* be. Willie and Jaye think this shows, again, how little Michael Dean is caring for his brother. They think it might be damn close to poisoning him. Which Michael Dean finds bewildering; guardian though he is, he points out that Patsy is the one who now oversees William's medicine intake.

But when it comes down to it, shouldn't a grown man take care of himself? Especially one who in 2014 was declared by a doctor, cognitive issues and all, to be capable of managing his own affairs and no longer in need of a guardian?

"When I'm ready, I'll take [Michael Dean] back to court and I'll get my guardianship back," Fridge says. But he's done nothing. And it's likely he never will. He's slip-sliding away. He seems tired of any struggle whatsoever.

"Talent can be a curse," says Hampton. "At 14, Fridge was the biggest thing in Carolina. Everybody expected him to play football. It's almost like he was a reluctant participant. He didn't have to sell out to be the best, and now he doesn't have to care."

Ditka, whose Gridiron Greats charity has helped pay for some of Perry's debts, finds it all heart-wrenching. "It's a great life wasted," he says. "There's no reason it has to happen. A bad deal? *No, he got a great deal!* In life you gotta help yourself. It's tragic. I think he's given up. And the question in my mind is, Why?"

THE AIR is clear and fresh at 1 p.m. on a Wednesday in Aiken; it's 78°, bright sun. The Masters will start soon in nearby Augusta, Ga., and flowers will start opening from south to north, like popcorn seeds cooking in a pan.

Fridge is in his car, parked under a shade tree near some men playing checkers. Two months from now he'll be hospitalized briefly for what Willie describes as a mini-stroke, his second in a short period. Michael Dean will deny that either ever occurred. But for now the big man is at ease, drinking beer from his cooler, his buddy Epps nearby, smoking and drinking, wiping away sweat with a white towel draped over his shoulder. We're barely two blocks from where Fridge was raised, and that seems relevant.

"I'm home," he says. "And I'm happy. I can't say everything is peachy keen, but I'm still enjoying life. I love Chicago, but there's no place like home."

The acrid stench from his car interplays with the fragrance of apple blossoms drifting in the breeze. He's making a stand right here. A declaration.

"I'm my own man," he says, seemingly tired of people trying to improve him. "It's simple. I ain't never trying to be famous. I never, ever try to be extravaganza. I'm just a plain old country boy!"

As if that explains it all. Or anything, really. □

Writing on The Wall

→ BY STEVE RUSHIN

THE MARLINS MOVED in their fences this season, as someone is always doing somewhere, because walls are never quite right and seldom welcome. Something there is that doesn't love a wall. Playoff teams have their backs against them, marathon runners hit the proverbial one, and Brooklyn Dodgers outfielder Pete Reiser so frequently ran into the wall at Ebbets Field that he helped give rise to the warning track. Walls come with warnings because only two things can happen when you're faced with one: You break the wall (see Kool-Aid Man) or the wall breaks you (Humpty Dumpty).

Even the most beloved wall in sports is called the Monster. The next most famous one, at Wrigley Field, is hidden by ivy. At Shibe Park in Philadelphia, A's owner Connie Mack commissioned a wall to keep apartment dwellers from watching the games for free. That wall and all those like it are called "spite fences." As Robert Frost would not have put it: Good fences spite good neighbors.

Walls seem inherently evil. Jim Courier hit tennis balls against a handball wall in Dade City, Fla., as an eight-year-old and said, "I hated that wall. It never missed."

But that wall also helped Courier become world No. 1. The Barcelona wizard Neymar learned soccer while kicking a ball against a wall in Praia Grande, Brazil. Carl Yastrzemski subtitled his autobiography *Baseball, the Wall and Me*, casting himself for posterity—as often happened literally—in the shadow of the Green Monster.

Few men outside prison have spent as much time contemplating a wall as Jim Abbott. Born without a right hand, Abbott pitched lefthanded against the wall of his end-unit townhouse in Flint, Mich., for hours as a kid. "It was a brick wall, and I drew a strike zone on it in chalk," he says. "Behind me the next building had facing windows, so there was also pressure to catch the ball." And so Abbott honed his famous glove switch by throwing a rubber ball and fielding its odd caroms, the wall doing what walls have always done for children in the summertime: "It filled up a lot of dead hours."

Without walls there'd be no place to hang the Mona Lisa, and Pink Floyd would have nothing to sing about. And yet walls are wildly unpopular. Every house hunter on HGTV, nattering on about an "open-concept kitchen," wants to tear them out. The Mets moved them in at Citi Field in 2011, and again last year. In between, the Mariners moved theirs. Walls, by design, are divisive. And so there's a Biblical impulse to see walls come tumbling down, from Jericho to John Mellencamp.

Pitchers are especially fond of tearing down walls, Abbott excepted. Kevin Brown, Brad Penny and Doyle Alexander are among the many pitchers who injured themselves punching out a wall. As a rookie, Nationals outfielder Bryce Harper swung his bat at a wall, which splintered the bat, which cut his face. In every single instance, they fought the wall and the wall won.

Of course, some deserve to be fought. Without getting into politics, Lionel Messi's glorious bending free kick for Argentina against the U.S. in the Copa América semifinal in Houston on June 21 demonstrated the utter pointlessness—the foolish hubris—of building a defensive wall in Texas.

But other walls are a work of art, even without a Banksy or a Basquiat to paint them. Three summers ago Abbott returned to his wall in Flint. "It didn't seem any bigger or smaller than I remember," he says, "but it did have a lonely feel. For me, there was always a bit of finding my way in the world, and throwing a ball at the wall helped me with that. I needed the quiet—not on a playground, not in a classroom, not with a parent or my brother—just me throwing a ball at a wall."

Many years later, taking the mound in pinstripes at Yankee Stadium, where he no-hit the Indians in 1993, Abbott couldn't help but think about playing Little League in Flint and those solitary summer hours spent dreaming in the yard. "I did think about that wall," he says, "because it was just so improbable." □

In sports and in life there's a Biblical impulse to see **walls come tumbling down,** from Jericho to John Mellencamp.

What's the next sports wall that needs to fall?
Join the discussion on Twitter by using **#SIPointAfter** and following **@SteveRushin**

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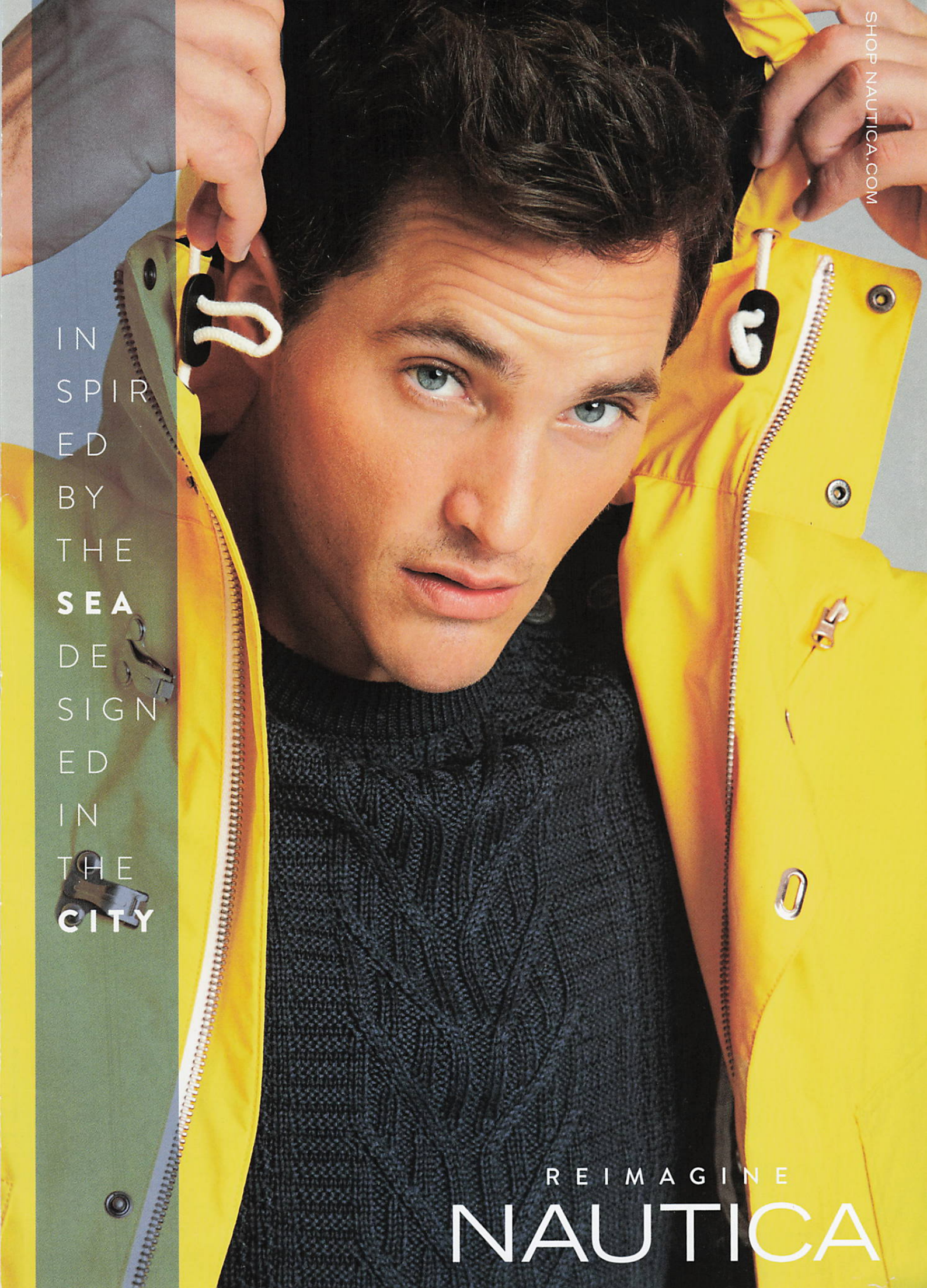
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